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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT AMONG CORPORATE WOMEN

BY

BONNIE R. STOWKOWY

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

FACULTY OF BUSINESS

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING 1989

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Perceptions of Support Among Corporate Women submitted by Bonnie R. Stowkowy in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to systematically explore the types of support perceived by women working as tokens or minorities in one male dominated corporation. Twenty-three women participated in a voluntary semi-structured interview. The interview questions were designed to allow the women to respond using their own descriptions of relationships in their own language and words. This method allowed a systematic look at the area of support without imposing categories or definitions.

The analysis of the interviews shows that the women do not feel isolated, and that they recognize a variety of forms of support from others. The true mentoring relationship was not found, but supervisors, particularly first supervisors, played a crucial role in the development of self-confidence and attitude. Peers, friends, parents, and spouses all provide different types of support during different times in a woman's life, and for different situations.

Recommendations for the organization are presented, and implications for further research are suggested.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Organizations are designed as bodies where collaboration is necessary for effective use of scarce resources. As groups within an organization and the organization itself need help from other groups and organizations to be successful, so must the individual members of the organization need help to succeed (Fenn, 1980). In large complex organizations, this help or power comes from inner circles of association within the organization (Fenn, 1980), or from social connections outside the immediate work group (Kanter, 1977). Informal access to these influential power circles can be granted through a sponsor or mentor.

Most of the attention has been focused on the male experience, and the findings show that men need mentors in order to grow and succeed in their personal and business lives (Kanter, 1977; Levinson, 1978; Strauss, 1968). Does this assumption also hold for women? Generalizations from male studies, and results from the limited number of small studies carried out with women show that it does. The lack of sponsorship is often cited as a reason why women do not achieve high levels of power in organizations (Kanter, 1977; Morrison, White & Van Velsor, 1987). Although the results lead to the same conclusion, "if sponsors are

important for the success of men in organizations, they seem absolutely essential for women" (Kanter, 1977, p. 183), the question posed by Speizer (1981, p. 693) should also be considered: "Are role models and mentors truly critical to professional advancement? Or are they merely another contemporary rationalization for women's lack of professional progress?"

More recent studies consider other forms of support that can perform the same functions as a mentoring relationship in a way that is more accessible and comfortable for women (Fox, Gibbs & Auerbach, 1985; Kirmeyer & Lin, 1987; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Woolsey, 1985). Peer relationships and friendships may provide women with the information and feedback necessary to develop in their careers and personal life.

The purpose of this study is to look at how a small group of women working in a corporation perceive their support networks, from whom support is received, and what form the support takes. These women work in areas where they are tokens or minorities, and clearly outnumbered by men (Kanter, 1977, p. 209). The study involved interviewing 23 women at various levels in the corporation. Care was taken to allow the women to describe the relationships in their own words and with their own terms. The perceptions of the supportive behaviour rather

than the actual behaviours of individuals was thought to be important in the adjustment of the women interviewed (Schaefer, cited in Sholomskas & Axelrod, 1986). Support from within and outside the corporation was discussed. The information gathered will add to the literature on the subject of corporate women and supportive relationships.

CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Definitions

One of the methodological flaws of much of the literature on mentoring and role models is that the terms are used in questionnaires and interviews without clear and concise definitions (Speizer, 1981). Although care was taken in this study to use definitions of terms rather than actual words which could have various different personal interpretations, a brief description of the generally accepted definitions follows.

Social Support

Individuals have perceptions of others' behaviours that influence their self-perceptions, well being, development, and actions in a positive manner. The information given in a supportive relationship leads one to believe that he or she is "cared for and loved, . . . esteemed and valued, . . . belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation" (Cobb, cited in Kirmeyer & Lin, 1987, p. 139).

Role Models

"Role models may be described as individuals whose behaviors, personal styles, and specific attributes are

emulated by others" (Shapiro, Haseltine & Rowe, 1978, p. 52). The search for a role model may be a selective process in which certain attributes are copied and other negative attributes are consciously discarded. The person acting as the role model performs a passive role, and may not even be aware of the process.

Mentors, Sponsors, Guides, and Peers

Shapiro et al. (1978) developed a continuum of active supportive relationships, as a function of intensity and hierarchy. This continuum is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Continuum of active support relationships

The mentoring relationship is the most intense, hierarchical and paternalistic relationship (Missirian, 1982). It is an elitist relationship distinguished by three elements: 1) power -- a mentor represents access to personal and material sources not formally available to a protege; 2) level of identification between the mentor and

protege -- both publicly acknowledge the existence of the relationship; and 3) intensity of emotional involvement -- there is a bonding and sharing aspect of the relationship giving an air of unconditional love (Missirian, 1982).

A true mentoring relationship follows three distinct phases; initiation, development, and termination (Hunt & Michael, 1983; Kram, 1983). In the initiation phase, the mentor recognizes the protege's ability and talent, and initiates the relationship. The focus is on instructing the protege on organizational culture, and management and personal style. The relationship is solidified in this phase, and after about one year the mentor initiates a move to the development phase. The development phase lasts from two to ten years and the focus shifts to building the protege's career. The relationship is characterized by fellowship, familiarity, mutual admiration, and respect. The final phase of a mentoring relationship is that of termination. The protege becomes more self-confident and autonomous, and the mentor's role becomes one of a counsellor and friend.

A mentoring relationship works best when the mentor gives direction, but allows opportunity for freedom and growth (Fenn, 1980; Peters & Austin, 1985). Of all the supportive relationships, it involves the greatest commitment of time and energy by both participants.

Sponsors are less powerful than mentors, but are still strong supporters of younger or less experienced individuals. The relationship involves less time commitment and does not achieve the same level of intensity as a mentoring relationship. Little research has been done in the area of sponsors or guides. Guides have less power in the organization and are less able to protect or promote the individual. They often serve as a source of information on the organization and associated systems in a more egalitarian relationship.

Peers provide help to each other in a democratic, egalitarian way (Shapiro et al., 1978). Peers are usually the same age or level in the organization, and usually of the same sex. These informal networks can serve a variety of support functions, as presented in Figure 2 (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

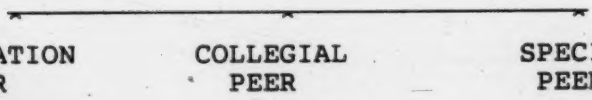

Figure 2. Continuum of peer relationships

Information peers are the most common type of peer found in the work setting, performing the function of information sharing. They demand little, and do not perform a social function. Collegial peers are more intimate, and the relationships are based on a moderate level of trust and self-disclosure. Special peer relationships are the most intimate, taking several years to develop. They offer intimacy and continuity, and are rarely seen in work settings (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

Friends

Tied closely to the discussion of peers is that of friendships. Friendships, particularly those between people of the same sex, are valued. Friendships tend to be based on a bond that is maintained in some way. The bonds may be circumstance or activity based, person centered, or relationship centered. Most work peer relationships are activity based, where the act of doing something together strengthens the bond (Woolsey, 1985). Relationship centered friendships are the most intimate, and generally occur outside the work setting.

Family

Family members, particularly parents, are very influential in the formation of attitudes and career

choices (Eccles, 1987; Houser & Garvey, 1985; Jagacinski, 1987; Noble 1987). The influence of family members is evident in early ages at home and school, rather than in the actual work setting.

The Male Experience

A mentor relationship is important in a young man's development (Levinson, 1978). The relationship often occurs in the work setting, where the mentor serves various functions including that of teacher, sponsor, guide, exemplar, and counsel, but is not a parent. Strauss (1968) also identified coaching from an experienced individual as being an integral part of learning for a person, to learn new skills and to get explanations of surprising events.

Much of the literature on career and support focuses on men. The largest study carried out on the subject was a survey of 1250 business executives by Roche (1979). Less than one percent of the respondents were women. The results showed that two-thirds of the respondents had a mentor or a sponsor, and of these, one-third had two or more mentors. Executives having a mentor, on average, earned more money at a younger age, were better educated, were more likely to have a career plan, derived greater pleasure from work, and sponsored more proteges than non-mentored executives. Roche did report the women's results separately, even though the response rate was low. The women in Roche's study averaged three mentors to the men's two. Most women formed the relationship with their mentor in the sixth to tenth years of their career,

compared to men who tended to form theirs in the first five years of their career.

Other researchers have identified the need for young people to develop power alliances to allow progression through an organization (Kanter, 1977; Sheehy, 1976; Williams, 1978). Again, many of these studies focus on the career development of men.

It is appropriate to ask whether the results can be attributed to women. Organizational theory has heavily emphasized the study of males, neglecting or de-emphasizing the contributions of women (Acker & Van Houten, 1978). Women are new to the corporation and, because of socialization and structural reasons, encounter different experiences in the work place.

The Female Experience

Elite positions in organizations have traditionally been reserved for men, with the exclusion of anyone who does not fit in the old boy's network (Fenn, 1980). In order to attain access to this power circle, a woman must be sponsored by someone from within, a difficult accomplishment. The structuring of organizations places women in powerless positions, making sponsorship essential for women to gain access to power, and function effectively as leaders by appearing to have power (Kanter, 1977). Talented women do rise up the corporate ladder without a mentor, but the rise can be hastened with this special service (Berry, 1983).

Men and women are generally socialized into traditional sex role behaviour, and women may experience difficulty in penetrating the elite of an organization because of their own attitudes and actions, and because of the assumptions and attitudes of others in the organization (Fenn, 1980; Hennig & Jardim, 1977). While men can communicate effectively with other men and are sufficiently assertive in their dealings, women typically relate to men, and men to women, in a sex role defined pattern that often is unsuitable for managerial development.

Women have difficulty in identifying with the competitive and assertive techniques used by men and often may not hear or see cues and signals used by men (Hennig & Jardim, 1977). Women, on average, do not have the socialized determination to succeed as men do, and feel that good performance by itself will be rewarded (McLane, 1980; Thompson, 1978). There tends to be a gap between the way things are, and the way women feel things should ideally be. Support and encouragement can help to reinforce confidence, provide challenges, and maintain a woman's general well being (Fenn, 1980; Kirmeyer & Lin, 1987).

In addition to structural and socialization factors, Buono & Kamm (1983, p. 1129) feel that the concept of marginality can be applied to situations where a unique individual is "viewed as one who is not of the group in which he or she participates, but one who imports qualities into it which do not and cannot stem from the group itself." Women working as tokens experience uncertainty in their acceptance which creates higher levels of stress and discrimination than if they were totally rejected by the group. Women do not know the culture, nor the rites and ceremonies ongoing within the culture. Conscious socialization of women into the organization will alleviate many of the problems associated with this lack of

acceptance (Buono & Kamm, 1983; Trice & Beyer, 1984; Van Maanan, 1983).

Some studies have looked at the issues of sponsorship, power and career advancement for women, and, with the exception of Strober (cited in Dipboye, 1987), all found that a mentor relationship was crucial for a woman's success (Hennig & Jardim, 1977; Michael & Hunt, 1985; Missirian, 1982; Morrison et al., 1987). As with men, women must evaluate their need for a mentor, the level or position of the mentor, and the reputation of the mentor. Women have an additional concern, that being whether to seek a male or female mentor. Female mentors may understand subtle differences between male and female behaviour, and may have a better understanding of the role conflicts faced by corporate women. However, female mentors may not be available, or women in higher levels may choose not to participate in a mentoring relationship if they are threatened or if they are too busy trying to establish their own careers. Male mentors may have greater access to power circles than do women since they still tend to be in the majority in upper echelons of organizations (McLane, 1980), but many males cannot interact with women outside of the traditional female servant or female sex goddess roles (Lee,.1980; Business Week, 1978). Failure to keep a mixed gender mentoring relationship platonic results

in other difficulties in which power dynamics and work group relationships can be affected (Mainiero, 1986; McBroom, 1986; Missirian, 1982; Thompson, 1978). Even if the relationship is kept on a career related path, it may be interpreted as sexual by peers and spouses. The woman is responsible for maintaining a professional attitude, as her career will likely suffer more than that of any man involved in the same type of relationship, as evidenced in the Agee-Cunningham affair (Bennett, 1980; Fenn, 1980; Fitt & Newton, 1981; Josefowitz, 1980).

Informal networks are another form of support that women can develop and use in an organization. These relationships with peers are important for the exchange of information and support, which often occurs in a more equal and empathic manner than in a relationship with a mentor or other superior in the organization (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Noe, 1988). Peer networks serve several purposes for newcomers to organizations. Often it is the only way newcomers can determine the appropriateness of their approach to tasks and handling of responsibility (Buono & Kamm, 1983). The informal network is also where myths and values are transmitted, information that is necessary in the socialization of newcomers into corporate life (Trice & Beyer, 1984; Zacharias, 1978). Rejection of women from informal networks may find its roots in blatant or subtle

discrimination, or may be due to self-exclusion by women to maintain the pattern of sex segregated association (Albrecht, 1978; Barclay, 1982). Whatever the reason for the rejection, the inability of women to join the informal networks impairs their socialization into the organization.

The exclusion of women from the informal support network creates other problems. Albrecht (1978) describes the close interdependencies between the informal and formal communication patterns. The informal network places constraints on the actions of individual members through blatant or subtle means. The resulting implication is that men and women do not associate informally. This attitude filters over to the formal organization because of the close links between the informal and formal networks. This results in the creation of barriers to women, denying them full participation in the formal organization.

Friendships are another form of support for women and men. Men tend to base their friendships on common activities that can be done together. Women primarily base their friendships on intimacy in everyday situations, with sharing of emotional support, intimacies, personal concerns, and confidences (Fox, Gibbs & Auerbach, 1985; Woolsey, 1985). These differing expectations may serve to further alienate women and men through misinterpretation of needs and actions.

Family support has been studied, particularly related to the influence of parental occupation on the selection of nontraditional careers by women (Blee & Tickamyer, 1986; Houser & Garvey, 1985; Jagacinski, 1987; Noble, 1987; Sholomskas & Axelrod, 1986). Results show that the choices women make regarding their career are influenced by the support they perceived from their parents and family in their childhood years. Women choosing careers in nontraditional areas in which they are the minority are reported as receiving more support from family and friends than are women in traditional careers.

Finally, spousal support may be crucial to women. Kanter (1977) devoted an entire chapter to the wives of the men of the corporation. These wives looked after all the duties at home so that the husband could focus his attention on his career and advancement. Women in business may come from dual career couples in which conflicts arise due to work overload, obligations, and roles (Nelson & Quick, 1985). Insecurities about one's career may cause the couple to compete with each other. The conflict between career and family is a large source of stress for working women. Child care usually remains the responsibility of the mother, regardless of the father's attitudes toward the subject. Other women may choose to

postpone intimate relationships in order to focus on advancing their career (Hennig & Jardim, 1977).

In summary, women do not have the same access to power in the organization as men do, but identification with a mentor or sponsor may help women advance in an organization. In addition, women do not have access to the same level of informal information that men do, again denying them access to power circles. The literature also shows that women look for different types of friendship than men, preferring a relationship on a more intimate, revealing level. Corporate women also have different stresses than corporate men, due to demands of family, child care, dual career relationships, and society.

The studies done to date have been mainly theoretical, focusing on one specific type of supportive relationship and its effects on career advancement for women. Much of the work has looked at the importance of mentors, a relationship which is difficult for women to develop. It is difficult to say if a mentor is important, or if other means of support can be used to advance in an organization. This study has been designed to look at the entire range of relationships that women have, using their own definitions of the relationship and the forms of support these relationships provide. The women studied are not the elite in the business world, but are average women

in working level or supervisory level positions in a male dominated corporation. It is their perspective that must be considered for the successful socialization and integration of women into traditionally male areas.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

Requirements

The purpose of this study was to obtain insight into the existence, influence, type and form of interpersonal support relationships developed and used by women employed in a predominantly male organization. Several forms of information collection were evaluated before the selection of a method was made. The objective was to obtain information from women in their own words to add to the current literature on women's experiences and perceptions. It is the language of the women and the method of data collection used to retain that language that are important. Mailed (i.e. mass) questionnaires and interviews were the two techniques evaluated in this regard.

The main difficulty of these forms of information collection is that the questions tend to elicit responses based on perceptions and attitudes rather than on actual behaviour (Labovitz and Hagedorn, 1981), but it may be that perceptions of behaviour relate to psychological adjustment more so than actual behaviours (Schaefer, cited in Sholomskas & Axelrod, 1986). It is the perception of support that is of interest in this study.

Two forms of questionnaire were considered. A structured format would allow an identical questionnaire to be administered to a large group of women over a wide geographical area at a relatively low cost. The ability to respond anonymously may result in more open responses (Stone, 1978). However, a structured questionnaire limits the participant's responses, and by forcing her to select from a set of given answers results in the loss of descriptive answers in the woman's own words.

An unstructured questionnaire has the same advantages as the structured format, although the data may be more difficult to analyze and interpret. An advantage over the structured format is that the unstructured questionnaire allows the respondents to answer questions in their own words.

The questionnaire is inflexible, for the most part, and does not allow for in-depth probing or questioning of a participant. The response rate is generally low, and missing data may present problems in analysis (Labovitz and Hagedorn, 1981; Stone, 1978). Participants must also be able to read and understand the questions, but this was not a problem with this study where the likelihood of illiterate participants was small.

The interview format was also evaluated as a method of data collection. Three interview strategies are possible

depending on the degree of structure in the questions and of the responses (Stone, 1978). In the unstructured interview, the interviewer serves only to keep the participant's discussion focused on a topic. At the other extreme, the structured interview resembles a structured questionnaire, where the respondent answers a standard set of questions by selecting from a standard set of answers. The semi-structured interview has the respondent replying to a predetermined set of questions in an open ended manner or, very rarely, the respondent may select a structured answer to an unstructured set of questions.

Interviews have several advantages in that they can be more flexible than questionnaires and the interviewer can clarify any questions the participant may have. This may, however, affect the reliability and validity of data, as each interview is different than the others (Stone, 1978). Response rates for interviews tend to be higher than that of questionnaires (Stone, 1978). Face to face communication allows the interviewer to observe the behaviour of the respondent, but again, participants may alter their responses simply due to the presence of an interviewer (Labovitz and Hagedorn, 1981). Other disadvantages include the increased resources, usually time and money, required to carry out interviews. The skill of the interviewer is important, particularly for the more

unstructured interviews, where interpersonal biases and faulty memory of participants may affect the results.

Weighing the advantages and disadvantages, the inflexibility and relatively structured nature of the questionnaire made it a less desirable form of data collection for this study. The semi-structured interview format was selected as the method of data collection for this study. The interviewer asked predetermined questions to which the participant could freely respond. The increased richness of data obtained from interviewing a smaller sample was preferred over a larger amount of data obtained through a questionnaire format.

Population

The population for the study was made up of selected women employed in one division of a large international natural resource based corporation, headquartered in Alberta. The division consists primarily of technically trained people such as engineers and computer scientists. The division also has a staff function component with duties including accounting, law, human resources, occupational health, and office administration. The division is predominantly male; as of December 31, 1987, 70 percent of the division's 2385 employees were male.

The consent of the corporation's Human Resources Department was obtained to proceed with the study. The department cooperated during the initial selection of the population by helping to identify the areas in the division where women were a minority, and where the positions women held were traditionally considered to be male in orientation. A large portion of the women employed by the corporation work in hourly paid secretarial or clerical positions, where little advanced training or education is required. Although a study of a broad cross section of women would be interesting, the focus of this study is on professional women working in salaried positions. There

was never any intention to use a population consisting of all women working in the division.

All jobs in the corporation are designated into one of six job "families." These are the professional, scientific, finance and accounting, operations, computer systems, and administrative support families. The administrative support family was not considered in this study, as it is made up primarily of women.

The professional family includes functions with a specialized knowledge base that is not clerical in nature. Included are positions in human resources, law, marketing, occupational health and safety, and other administrative functions pertaining to the executive level of the corporation. As of July 31, 1988, this family consisted of 260 people, of which 107, or 41 percent, were female.

The functions of the scientific family are those concerned with research and the practical application of scientific knowledge. Included are engineering, research, geological, environmental, and scientific support functions. As of July 31, 1988, 45, or approximately ten percent, of the 457 people in this family were women.

The finance and accounting family deals with profitability and the handling, raising, and monitoring of funds. Job positions in this family include the areas of

finance, accounting, economics, and auditing. As of July 31, 1988, this department consisted of 114 people of which 48, or 42 percent, were women.

The operations family includes trades and labourer positions in the field setting, as well as technical support and operations personnel in the office. On July 31, 1988, 114, or 11 percent, of the 1019 employees in this group were women.

The computer systems family deals with the physical operation, system support, and system and software development for the corporation. As of July 31, 1988, 64, or approximately 30 percent, of the 234 persons in this group were women.

Within each job family, women hold various positions at different levels in the organizational hierarchy. The corporation classifies level of position based on level of responsibility. The higher the classification number, the higher the level in the corporation. Women in the professional and technical areas are salaried, and are classified differently from women in positions where an hourly wage is earned. In most cases, there are three levels below first line supervisor. These are "working levels" and are differentiated by the amount of responsibility designated to the position. The lowest level is held by many administrative people and by

professionals during their training periods. The next higher level holds increased responsibilities, and people work more on their own, with less supervisory input. In administrative areas, people in this area may supervise secretarial or clerical staff. The highest working level is generally a senior technical level, with people working on their own. Above the working levels are several supervisory or technical specialist roles. First line supervisors and senior technical specialists are roughly equivalent in their positions. The next higher position is second line supervisor, followed by manager, vice president, senior vice president, and then positions on the Board of Directors of the corporation. The level in the organization was important in the selection of the population. The number of women in levels above that of second level supervisor dropped significantly, and it was felt that confidentiality could not be assured for women higher than this level. It was necessary to truncate the population so as not to include women above the level of second level supervisor.

The researcher worked with the Human Resources Department in the identification of a suitable population, but at no time was informed of the identity of women in the population. Women meeting all the criteria mentioned above received a letter from the Manager of the Human Resources

Department, along with a document from the author (see Appendix 1). The document described the study and its purpose, and included a consent form to be signed and returned to the author if the recipient chose to participate. These initial documents were sent to 133 women. It was stressed that participation was voluntary, and that confidentiality would be assured.

Women agreeing to participate completed the consent form and returned it to the author. The volunteer's name, signature, address, and phone number were included on the top half of the form. Job title and level were indicated on the lower half. Upon receipt of the form, the author coded and separated the two sections. The sample was selected through reference to the job title and level only. The Human Resources Department was not informed of the identities or job titles of the respondents.

Responses were received from 55 women representing all five of the job families. Six responses were received from women in other divisions of the corporation, and for comparative purposes, these responses were excluded from further consideration. The response rate, including the six responses, was 41.4 percent. It is difficult to determine the response rate from just the division being studied, as it is unknown how many women outside the

division received the initial contact letter. The number of responses from each family is indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

Response Distribution

Organizational Family	No. of Responses
Professional	16
Scientific	10
Finance/Accounting	7
Operations	4
Computer Systems	12
Other Divisions	6

The percentage of women in each family agreeing to participate in the study is shown in the first column of Table 2. The low response rate from the operations family reflects the large number of women in clerical positions who were not approached for the study. The Human Resources Group did not track the number of women approached in each family. The second column in Table 2 indicates the percentage of total responses coming from each family..

Table 2

Response Rate

Organizational Family	Percentage of Women in Family Responding	Percentage of Total Responses
Professional	15.0	32.7
Scientific	22.2	20.4
Finance/Accounting	14.6	14.3
Operations	3.5	8.2
Computer Systems	18.8	24.4
		100.0

The population was used to select a sample to study. This population is not representative nor random in nature, but rather hand picked to satisfy the needs of the study.

Sample

The 49 responses were evaluated and a purposive sample selected for study. This type of sample, where subjects are hand picked, is suitable for this study where the researcher believes interviewing women from a variety of job positions will result in differing perceptions (Stone, 1978).

Three women were chosen for preliminary interviews in order to practice the questions and to determine the length of time the interviews would take. Twenty women were selected as first choices, and eleven as second choices. Fifteen were excluded from further consideration. Table 3 shows the selections made from each job family.

Table 3

Breakdown of Sample by Organizational Family

Organizational Family	Preliminary	First Choice	Second Choice	Eliminated
Professional	2	3	3	8
Scientific	0	5	3	2
Finance/Accounting	0	4	1	2
Operations	0	3	1	0
Computer Systems	1	5	3	3

Preliminary choices were made based on location of employment and level in the organization. The professional women had several years of work experience, and were selected as they could potentially provide information that could change the interview questions and format. The woman in computer systems was chosen to give the researcher some exposure to the specialized and unfamiliar to her computer systems area.

The twenty women selected as first choices were chosen to represent various positions and various levels within the organization. Levels ranged from the lowest working level up to second level supervisor. The upper levels were over represented, as were the technical areas in the organization. Second choices were identified to substitute in the event women selected in the first choice category were not available for interviews.

At the interview, the women were asked how long they had been with the corporation. The responses ranged from four months to eleven and a half years. Table 4 summarizes the frequency responses for the different tenure periods.

Table 4

Time With the Corporation

Years	Frequency
1 or less	3
2 - 4	2
5 - 7	9
8 - 11.5	9

The mean time with the corporation was 6.6 years, the median was 7 years, and the modes were 6 and 10 years. These statistics are interesting in that the corporation embarked on an affirmative action program from 1981 to 1983, in order to recruit women and visible minorities. At the time of the interviews, this would have corresponded with women working at the corporation between five and seven years. Nine of the 23 women fell into this category. Fewer women had service of less than five years. This is due partly to the restrained hiring carried out by the company during the recession period, but is most likely due to the sampling procedure, where higher levels, hence longer service, were chosen.

One woman with over ten years of service at the company was found to have recently transferred to another division

of the corporation. She was included in the results due to her long tenure.

All 23 women in the preliminary and first choice categories agreed to participate in the interview process. All responses were acknowledged, and all respondents were promised a copy of a summary of results.

Interview

The interview was of a semi-structured format. Each participant was asked the following questions:

1. Briefly outline your education after high school.
2. What led you to pursue that area?
3. Did your parents work? What did they do?
4. Outline your career history beginning with your first job.
5. Looking at your career, was there anyone who stands out who gave you advice, guidance, encouragement or support, and that you knew this at the time?
6. Do you have any examples of what they did or said that you saw as supportive?
7. Was there anyone else who stands out? (Respondent was prompted at this time depending on answers to questions 5 through 7).
8. Do you act independently in your job? In what areas? (Asked only if not mentioned by respondent during discussion).
9. Now that you have been thinking about your career, is there anyone who was supportive, but at the time you were not aware of it, or you did not interpret their actions as being supportive?

10. Is there anyone who you perceive as being a role model for you? This can be someone you know, or someone you have seen or heard about, say in the media.

The interviews were generally held in the woman's office. The interviews lasted from twenty minutes to about one hour and twenty minutes, and averaged about 45 minutes. They were tape recorded and transcribed afterwards.

After the interview, the interviewer discussed the focus of the study with the women participating. In most cases the women expressed surprise at the content of the interview as they felt it was going to focus on negative aspects of women in business, and how women are discriminated against. This is interesting, as all women received a description of the study in the initial contact letter, in which the topic of discussion was identified. During this discussion it was stressed that the purpose of the study was to gather information on support relationships women set up during their careers.

The transcripts of the interviews were reviewed for themes using the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

CHAPTER IV RESULTS

This section presents the information gathered in the interviews with the 23 women. It covers educational levels and factors influencing higher education and course selection. The major focus is on the women's perception of support received from others. Initial discussions look at support recognized by the women, while later ones discuss ways in which they perceive others as being supportive.

Education

The education levels of the women interviewed varied widely. The results are summarized in Table 5. Several women have taken management courses within and outside of the company, and a few mentioned they were pursuing master's degrees on a part time basis.

Table 5

Highest Level of Education

Description	Number of Women
Did not finish high school	1
Secretarial school	2
Diploma from Community College/Academy	3
Technologist	2
Professional Certification - CMA, Personnel, etc	1
Baccalaureate Degree - Science/Engineering	9
Baccalaureate Degree - Arts/Commerce	2
Master's Degree	3

Several factors were described as influencing the schooling choice. Table 6 summarizes these factors. Nineteen women responded.

Table 6

Influencing Factors

Description	Number of Women
Parents	6
Family Expectation	2
Family Expectation, sought help	1
Mother	2
Mother, colleagues	1
Colleagues	1
Father, teachers, acquaintance	1
No encouragement	3
No encouragement, sought help	2

The importance of the family in attitude toward school and career was primary in the responses to this question. Some women perceived an unconditional support from their parents, where any choice of higher education or career would have been accepted. Others responded with a perception of proactive support, in which the parents or family provided direction toward a specific area of study, or in which the family provided direction toward higher education without giving specific direction. Implicit support was reported, in which proactive, outward support was not perceived, but there was disappointment expressed when the woman did not attend university or pursue higher

education. Some women perceived a reactive kind of support in which their parents and family were negative about higher education or their choice of career. These categories of support were also perceived as coming from colleagues, teachers and counsellors.

There were few cases where encouragement was unconditional. "I was lucky in that my parents did not force me to do anything. They just planted some seeds of advice and let me go on and use that to the best of my interests, my career, and pretty well whatever I wanted to do, they would have supported. And really encouraged I guess, without my realizing it, just by the mere fact that they let me do my own thing, they really encouraged a sense of independence and responsibility."

Other women described a generally supportive family environment. One described how her father quit a job and started his own company. "And the company became a family company where my mother would man the office, or woman the office, and she would keep the books and all us kids would work for them. So yes, both my parents did work, basically self employed. And the whole family worked. So we would spend our summers working for them, and our weekends and any spare time we had we would work in the company. And I think that again had a big influence on me because we did work as a unit and ended up being quite successful." One

woman claimed her interest in business was because her "father worked in business, so I always had a little bit of an inkling from that that I wanted to get into business. My mother didn't work."

There was a perception that mothers were more influential than fathers in the choice of further education and career. "I tended to watch my mother. She was quite a role model for me because she, when I was growing up it wasn't common for mothers to be working mothers. And she had been a working mother ever since I could remember." "I was the last girl in my family, and my mom really wanted to, she wanted me to do the best." "I think even more than dad, because dad was too busy all the time. She was the one that really wanted me to get something, and the same with my sister, well, all of us actually . . . I think she really pushed for the different things because probably she would have wanted to have done it if she had had the chance."

One woman saw her influence as stemming from her discussions with her father. "My dad was always encouraging me, you know, just to do well in it, to sit down and study. He always, I think he always liked science. So we were able to talk about it."

Few women reported the directive proactive support in which they were directed toward a particular type of higher

education or a particular field of study. Occasionally, the influence was very direct. "My parents did influence me to go to university, but in terms of what I went for, they influenced me to go into pharmacy, and so I did go into pharmacy and then I changed out. After which I had a little falling out between my parents and I. They definitely didn't push me to go into [the area I did]. They really wanted pharmacy."

The most common perception was that of support for higher education, where the woman knew she was going to further her education, but where there was no specific direction toward an area of study. "My father's a farmer. My mother is, was a public school teacher, elementary school teacher. She went back to work when I was in grade six. But that was a strong influence for higher education, was my mother, rather than anybody else." "Because my parents are both university educated and I never doubted that I would go to university. It was just sort of a fact of life." "I got encouragement from my parents to go to university. They didn't necessarily care, seem to care what I took. The encouragement was more to go and take something." "My parents encouraged us to go into post secondary education, but they never stressed it at all. And they certainly didn't stress university. I don't know why. I kind of wish I had gone to university now. But

there was never any mention of going to university." "I think that the family that I grew up in, it was always expected that you would go to university. It was just an extension of high school There was never any doubt in my mind that I would go to university. So there was no specific encouragement, but then yet there was always an expectation, and taken for granted that I would go to university." "They were not all that concerned about what department I was in or what degree I would have when I completed university, but they were highly motivated for me to go back to school. They didn't like the idea of having, of having a daughter who just worked from pay cheque to pay cheque sort of thing, and had a job rather than a career." "Both my parents have a university education . . . at least initially they had a strong influence in the kind of courses that I took . . . But when I first started going to university, my parents gave me some direction on what kinds of things they thought I should take at university and where they could see the world going. . . . But they didn't push me to say well you should be a doctor, you should be an engineer, you should be an architect, you should be a street cleaner, you should be a nurse, you should be anything. It was go and do what you want to do. And eventually you are going to have to support yourself so it

wouldn't hurt if you learned something along the way and got a job."

One woman perceived implicit support from her parents, after she decided not to further her education, but also viewed their attitude as being unconditionally supportive. "They were very disappointed in that when I went out of high school I didn't carry on, but you know I was young and wanted to do my thing and earn some money and buy a car and all the rest of it. So I did that for a little while, but they were very encouraging."

Several women felt that they would further their education, while perceiving that they received negative reactions from the family. "My dad thought it was stupid. He thought you don't learn anything at university." "I think they were probably from the old school. 'You know that you're going to get married anyway, so it doesn't really matter.'"

Only three women remember seeking help about their career choice. Most often they went to teachers or guidance counsellors, and the type of support perceived was similar to the classifications discussed above. Most responses fell into the support for the woman's choice, and the giving of information to help her in her choice, without providing a specific direction of study. "I wasn't quite sure about engineering, so I asked my one science

teacher who I liked, and he told me, 'yea, engineering would be the place to do something, that a person with my skills could do.'" "There was one other girl that was, she must have been two or three years ahead of me that had gone to the same high school that I had. And I talked to her and said how do you like it and what's it like? And she just, I didn't know her very well, so I didn't have a lot of discussions with her, I talked to her once. And she said, 'oh, it's fine, it's good.' . . . We didn't have really strong counsellor, guidance counsellor in school. Like they were always there if you wanted to ask them questions, and they had all the information there for you to look at. And they did push you to make a decision, but they didn't push you one way or the other. And no one told me not to either. Which I guess was one good thing."

The issue of guidance counsellors arose in another interview, where one woman perceived them as a negative force. "Actually, they weren't very helpful. They were actually really negative when I think back. That they were trying to steer you into conventional areas . . . I talked to them and they weren't as cooperative as I thought they'd be, helping me find out more. They couldn't understand why I didn't want to be a teacher or a nurse. Even when I wanted to go into medicine, it was like 'well why don't you be a nurse?'"

Colleagues were considered important in two cases. These women were in the work force at the time they decided to pursue further education on a part time or full time basis. "My boss there and the counsellors I worked for and with at [place] realized I had more potential . . . And then when I got promoted, they realized I had a lot more potential and certainly encouraged me to return to school." "They recognized some skill there that needed to be developed and it was through their resource that I felt that this was the best route to go."

The women were asked their parents' occupations to see if the choice of a career by a woman was influenced by her father or mother. Twenty women responded to the question, and the results are summarized in Table 7. Only one woman identified her mother as being a "quite a role model for me because she, when I was growing up, it wasn't common for mothers to be working mothers. And she had been a working mother ever since I could remember. And I was a latchkey kid ever since I could remember. And that was all right with me." The women generally perceived the attitude of the parents and family as more influential than the parents' occupations. This raises the question of what did influence the women in their choice of occupation if the parents did not?

Table 7

Parents' Occupations

Occupation		Frequency
FATHERS:	.Professional (Teacher, Business, Doctor, Engineer)	11
	.Tradesman, Labourer	4
	.Farming	2
	.Self-employed/family business	2
	.Unknown	1
MOTHERS:	.Professional (Teacher, Nurse, University)	5
	.Banking, Office work	3
	.Labourer	1
	.Self-employed/family business	2
	.Farming	1
	.Homemaker	7
	.Deceased	1

There are indications from the information in Table 7 that many of the women interviewed come from an upper socio-economic group. Over half had fathers working as professionals. About one-third grew up in homes where the mother was a homemaker. Many of the stay at home mothers were university educated.

Selection of Area of Study

Once the decision was made to obtain higher education, the selection of a route or major was next. The information summarized in Table 8 shows that the majority of women were good in science and math in high school, and many 'just fell' into their field.

Table 8

Reasons for Course Selection

Description	Number of Women
Good at sciences and math	2
Good at sciences and math/fell into it	3
Good at sciences and math/wanted a job	4
Good at sciences and math/liked the area	1
Didn't know/Fell into it	3
Wanted to get a job	1
Liked the area	3
Pressure from parents	1
Bored of current job	1
Wanted an easy choice	1
Medical reasons	1
Saw a pamphlet on it	1

The selection of a discipline at college or university seemed to be based on technical skills or self-confidence and drive of the women. "I wanted to be a doctor. And as

I got through high school, it started to sink in that the life-style wasn't conducive to the extracurricular activities that I wanted to have time for. Plus the thought of another 10 years of education after high school scared me, so I sat back and talked to guidance counsellors and did some research into what other things my interests could lead to. And I was good at math and physics, I wanted something kind of practical. Engineering seemed good, a good field and interested me. I didn't really know very many engineers or any exposure in my family. It was just this would work, this sounds interesting, and sort of talked to some other people and it sounded good." "At the time there were lots of people graduating from arts type courses and couldn't get jobs. And that was apparent at that time. So I just decided that I wanted to go through something that would give me a job when I got out. And I sat down and went through the university calendar and eliminated several things like education because I didn't think I wanted to teach. Medicine because it took too long, and I didn't think that I could handle it. Same thing with law. Law took too long and I wasn't all that interested. I wasn't, in high school, I wasn't particularly good at public speaking or things like that and I really loved math, so engineering seemed to be the right thing to go into because it was very much math

oriented. And I thought I'd enjoy it. I had no idea that when I went in there that I would be the only girl in the class. So that was kind of surprising. But it was just a process of elimination." "I sort of went through all the courses and found out which had the most math. I didn't know, I knew nothing about computers when I went. No comprehension whatsoever. I knew I wanted a secondary education and math was what I enjoyed taking." "My math teacher told me, he said 'you know, there's a lot of guys in engineering.' I guess it's relevant to this, but I was so cocky, it didn't seem to matter to me. I just figured that I'd zip through it. I thought so who cares if there's guys there?"

Others made their choices from the point of view of getting a job in the end. "I remember it was a difficult choice because I also liked languages and geography and history. And I thought, well what do I take? And my highest marks though were always in the sciences and math and physics. And I also knew that I would have a better opportunity of getting a job in those areas." "I didn't know anyone who had ever gone to university. Neither of my parents finished high school, so they weren't much help. But I was always good at math and things like that. And I liked physics and all those types of subjects, math especially, and I also liked French and languages, but I

realized you made a lot more money being an engineer." "I worked for a year after high school as a bank teller and knew that the money, I wasn't happy with it, so money motivated it a lot."

Some women were working in one area, took courses in another, and chose to do something different. "I ended up taking some night classes while I was working for the bank, and one of those was an introduction to computer programming. . . . I found it to be very interesting. I really enjoyed programming, it was like creating something. . . . And I find a lot of satisfaction in that and decided that I would go back to university and do that full time." "Computer sciences was just an interest that I had, but then while I was in computer sciences, I was taking an accounting course and the person I was taking it from was a CMA and it was just really interesting. It just got me interested in that. And I found computer sciences very repetitive and quite boring."

Support and Career -- Volunteered Responses

Support Perceived at Time it Occurred

The women were asked to identify someone who they, at the time, perceived as being supportive of them in their career. The question was phrased openly, so no prompts were given. On several occasions the interviewer was asked questions as to whether the question meant someone at work or not. The response was that the question meant anybody who the woman felt provided them with guidance, advice, encouragement or help, at anytime, with the woman perceiving the support at the time. The question did not restrict the responses to include only the tenure with the corporation. The responses can be summarized as follows:

Table 9

Support - Initial Response

Person	Frequency
Supervisor	5
Supervisor, other superior	2
Supervisor - asked for help	1
Supervisor, colleagues	5
Nobody	5
Husband	2
Husband, friends	1
Superior, not direct supervisor	1
Mother, grandmother, instructor	1

The results were broken down further in terms of level in the organization, and job family in the organization. This information is presented in Tables 10 and 11.

Table 10

Support by Woman's Current Job Level

Level	Supervisor/ or Superior	Supervisor/ and Others	Others	None
WORKING:				
Low	0	0	1	0
Intermediate	4	1	1	1
High	0	1	0	2
SUPERVISORY:				
First level	3	4	2	1
Second level	0	0	1	1

Table 11

Support by Woman's Current Job Family

Family	Supervisor/ or Superior	Supervisor/ and Others	Others	None
Professional	1	2	2	0
Scientific	0	1	1	3
Finance/Acct.	2	1	1	0
Operations	2	1	0	0
Computer Sys.	2	1	1	2

The information in Tables 10 and 11 shows that over half of the women interviewed perceive a supervisor or superior in the organization as being supportive. Immediate supervisors were cited most often, including one situation in which the woman asked for help. Most frequently it was the first supervisor a woman had when she began working whom she perceived as showing confidence in her and her abilities. ". . . believing in your skills without having maybe proven yourself first. They believe you have the abilities to handle responsibility. I know, well, I guess this lady at [previous place of employment], she, they needed a supervisor for weekends, and I was like maybe 19 at the time. But she knew that I was hard working and responsible. She offered me the job over lots of people saying 'oh, she's too young, she won't be able to do it, she won't be able to handle it.' Knowing just I guess, that I could." "When I first started as a summer student in the operations area, the guy who hired me . . . He really motivated me. He really, he took me in and I knew nothing or anything about computers and how to operate this equipment. And he taught me all, no matter what I did I was doing a good job, and he was interested in what I wanted to do in the future. . . . And that's just giving you a chance before you have a chance to prove yourself. He helped me get in the door by doing that."

Some women attributed their advancement to support and encouragement received from supervisors, and occasionally said they thought the supervisor publicly supported them to others. One woman started as a secretary, and then ". . . I worked for a woman who got the training position from Ottawa to put me into the, what we would call an analyst kind of position. When I look back, I think that's sort of my big break, because it's very hard to break out of secretarial work into professional work. . . . She obviously had confidence in what I could do because she was willing to stick her neck out and get a position for me to do something different. . . . We worked well together, and she advanced my career." "He talked to some people about how he thought I was a good employee and that really, to me, that was the whole starting point. . . . He was really interested in what I wanted to do, and he was still interested in hiring me because he thought I was a good person, and if I wanted to do other things, sure he'd help me do that. And another thing was when [a job came up in another location], I don't know this officially, but I have a pretty good feeling that he put in a good word for me. And that was one of the reasons that I got the job."

Another woman thought her supervisor was the exception, rather than a typical supervisor. "He's the kind of manager that's very good at, if it's your work, then your

name goes on it. And you go to the meetings and represent your work. He would never pass things off as his work, or you know, hide the fact of who did it. And I think he's the best manager that I've ever had that way in terms of recognition. Taking you to meetings, you know, that normally would be reserved for management level. We've been in meetings sometimes and people would question why I was there, and he can't believe that they would ask." "I think that he always gave me his support so that when the managers would come to him and say 'she's telling me this and I don't believe it', he would always say, 'well look it, let me tell you what's been happening.' . . . Or if they tried to bypass me and go to him, he would say, 'talk to her, she's in charge.' So I always knew that he backed me up on whatever I did."

Some women viewed a supervisor as being supportive by the type of assignments they received and were allowed to work on. For some, this helped to increase their self confidence. "I saw that as a real vote of confidence. Because anybody could see what was going on there, and they needed some help in this area. So they put me into this job, even though I didn't have the background for it. So I saw that as a real good opportunity, too. It was a real ego builder, made me feel real good because they thought I could do it. I could do it, I did it." "He's been, he

understands that I sort of would like to go further and has given me lots of chances and is always coming in with 'oh this is a good project, once you have this project under your belt, it's good exposure, good experience.'" "Primarily supportive in as far as giving me new things to do. Letting me make decisions, letting me work on my own. I like to work on my own, I don't like someone standing over my shoulder." "I think I was sometimes given temporary assignments or special projects that helped me expand my knowledge or expertise in a certain area. And that's helped me now in the kind of job that I got. . . . In the types of things I did as part of my job, I think he gave me a lot to improve my net worth to the corporation. To improve my value."

When asked for specific examples of what supervisors did that was supportive, the answers fell into three categories -- career, technical, and political. The company does not have a career path or training route for people entering it. Much of the career advice is dispensed formally in the annual performance review, but rarely do the supervisors participate in informal career discussions. One supervisor encouraged a woman to develop "portable skills that you could use in any job."

Some examples fell into the technical aspect of the job. "Development of staff. I never ever supervised

before. So that was a major challenge for me, was to learn how. . . . When I think back, they really left me on my own in a lot of ways, but they were always there to make sure I wasn't going to stumble into something that might be a bad problem." "I wouldn't go to him and tell him all my personal problems or whatever, but if I had any problems with the work I was doing, I knew I could always go and talk to him. And he would make supportive suggestions, or whatever." "When I was running my first project and when I first started out as a supervisor, if I would kind of have an idea, but not sure if it was the best or the right idea, I know I could always run it past him and say, 'well what do you think?' Without feeling like I was not doing my job, or that he would think any less of me because I was doing that."

Most of the specific examples cited dealt with the political aspect of life in the corporation. "She was definitely politically astute, definitely understood the players and the whole role of networking. And I learned from her, not necessarily that she shared it as a mentor, because she wasn't the type, but she would share what she needed to share to get the job done." "He would always listen if there was an issue. He would be there to listen to it or to discuss it. He was always there to help me politic the whole thing. How to get a policy passed. He

knew the right people always to talk to and how to get it through." "He's always trying to give me some diverse opportunities and exposure and stuff. . . . We've had a lot of discussions and he's surprised sometimes when I tell him some of the problems that I've had, that I perceive I'm having because I'm female. He's, 'that's nonsense, we'll get you through, don't worry about it.'" One woman had specific examples of how her supervisor coached her in how to act in her profession, particularly since there were few women in it at the time. "He gave me advice lots of times. . . . they all know you, but you don't know all of them. And he was really good that way. He pointed out the things I should do and the things I shouldn't do. And he was very candid about what he said. And I think that helped too. And over the years, things he said have come back to me, and he was right. The way he thinks, the way he molded me, I guess, and I would say that he did."

Other women who believed that their supervisors were supportive specifically mentioned that it was not in any political or personal way. "I think I always knew how to handle myself. I think, even when I was a secretary, I was doing things that surprised people that were non-secretarial." "I think the political stage, I'm, after six years I'm finally able to handle it. And I feel I've done well based on my own skills and that I'm no longer

questioning whether I'm getting opportunities because I'm a girl. Because in 82 when I started, the majority of hires were female engineers, and my peers were always saying 'oh yea, well you were hired because XXXXX wanted to show off that we were a progressive company.' And I said 'fine, that's great, it got me in the door, but now that I'm here, it's up to me to prove myself.' So I've done it that way, and I'm less threatened by other people's opinions. In this company there's a lot of rumours and things like that about what it takes for a woman to get to the top. . . . I can't judge if it's real or not, but there is a negative stereotype that every woman professional here has to face." "They've pretty much given me the, just fairly free reins. I've been able to do what I want to do. And if it means I'm going to hang myself, well, they'd let me go hang myself. Usually they've caught me at the last minute."

Some women stated that they did not receive different treatment from that received by their peers. "He does that with the whole group, not just me. He's that kind of a manager. He nurtures his people. And takes a lot of pride when his people do leave here and end up with good positions. It makes it very helpful, he's good that way." "It wasn't something that was being done as a favour for me, right? It was something that had to be done anyways. And it was just that I was there and it was just

beneficial for me to do it. . . . I don't think it was even a conscious thing on his part, I don't think it was anything special that he wouldn't do for anybody. All supervisors want their employees to develop, so it wasn't anything special because it was me, or I was female, or anything like that."

One woman did not receive what she perceived as support from her supervisor until she asked for it. "There were a couple of occasions when the supervisor there was very supportive, but again it was almost the situation where I went in and asked, 'what do I do about this? How can I further this aspect of my career? Or what can I do about that?' That the advice was given. It was never, it was never given without having been asked, when I asked specifically for it."

Seven women indicated that another person, in addition to the immediate supervisor, was supportive. Two identified a superior other than the supervisor, and four identified colleagues. For one woman, the supervisor's supervisor was mentioned, "I remember him saying supportive things. Like when I was grateful for these opportunities, he gave me some pretty good jobs, he would, well his attitude always was that I earned it. And his message to me was, well, you don't get anything you haven't earned, so stop being so grateful." Another woman was having trouble

with her immediate supervisor and did not perceive him as supportive. Her problem was solved by another superior in the corporation. "He was just very domineering, and he was, what's the right word for it, I don't want to say untrusting, but close to it. And when I brought that to the attention of the manager, that I was having trouble working under that condition, I couldn't do it. They were very good and quick about moving me off to another group where I would report directly to the manager."

Five women have the perception that they received no support from anyone during their career. They made statements that expressed more self confidence and drive than did many of the other women. "It was just my drive to make the product that I was working on better. And try and to improve the technology and methods to be cost effective. . . . It's an interesting field to be in, but also you can't relax." "I guess I've never really been in a situation where I've felt I've needed any." "There certainly hasn't been anyone that's done any extra, or given myself any special attention or extra attention. Most of it, I myself, I am a great observer of life, so most of what I've learned is through observation. And through mistakes, learning from those. . . . I can remember, in fact I think it was during my first couple of months working here that someone said something was

impossible. And I said I just don't believe, in that case I really didn't believe it was impossible. And so I said 'I didn't believe that', and the supervisor at the time said, 'well okay, prove it then.'"

Husbands were perceived as being supportive by three women, who all mentioned them without hesitation. Two of these women belonged to the group of several women who were married to, or had close relationships with, men working at the same company. Only one worked closely with her husband. "He tells me the mistakes that some of the other people make, and you realize that you're not the only one that does some goofy things every once in a while." Another said "he just has a lot of faith in me. He just feels that I am always putting myself down, that I have more ability to do more than what I am doing, and he'll, you know, try and get me to do more. . . . he reminds me that I haven't really had any failures." A woman in the technical area said her husband is not a technical person, but "asks questions like 'why don't you do this? Or have you thought of doing this? Or you could do this and this would be the benefit.'"

The woman who identified a girlfriend from university as being supportive said the main reason was "she feels exactly the same way. There are a lot of similarities and patterns that you can see emerging, and it's just not

necessarily the one company, or one individual, but I think it's just a basic feeling." She continued to describe the "redneck" attitude toward women in the engineering field that she could discuss with her friend.

One woman perceived her mother and grandmother, and an instructor at school as being supportive, in a personal way. Her mother would baby-sit her children when she needed time out to study or rest. Her grandmother "would never put me down for anything I did. . . . She would say 'good for you, I'm proud of you.'" And the instructor would give her words of encouragement when she felt like giving up.

Colleagues provided a different kind of support. The women who identified both supervisors and colleagues as being supportive tended to obtain a more personal, moral support from their peers. "That's the way I would say they helped me. Actually in the technical end of it. And support, I guess morally and that way too. Being very young and the first job. It's kind of nice to have someone in the same field as you are that you can talk to. Bounce ideas off, ask for assistance when you have problems, that sort of thing.". "There's another fellow I've never worked really directly with. He's always been in the same department and he is quite a bit older and he is always the type that you could go and talk to. More so on a personal

level. And he's always been there to make suggestions, or give a hand if you needed one. . . . If I was having a problem with an employee, not necessarily someone I was working for, working for me, but maybe someone I was working with. I could go to him and say, 'well what could I do to get this guy off my back? Or is this guy as bad as I think he is?' Or stuff like this. And he'd you know, sometimes make suggestions, or just even talking to him would help." One woman replaced a colleague after he was promoted and transferred. "I'm pretty sure it was him who recommended that I should be the acting supervisor, and not some of the other people who were there. . . . He recognized me over that other person. So there he helped me just by getting me into that position."

One woman claims colleagues were her "true supporters. If I had it to do all over again, I would choose them to be working with. . . . They stretched me professionally. They were also people who understood the business and had a direction. And had a vision and therefore knew why the political winds were changing. . . . And knew enough players in departments to know who you've got to win over first. And I learned that from them, just by observing them. Because it's not something that they can teach you sort of day in and day out. You just kind of have to observe and just kind of stumble into it, every once in

awhile. But I knew they knew from experience where they were headed. And I would watch them." Several women began their careers in a secretarial role, and one says it was the senior or executive secretaries "who encouraged me not to hang around in the secretarial world, and said 'I think you should, if you want to do what you're planning to do, you just go for it.' And they didn't hold me back, in fact they were the ones who pointed out that this job was available and said 'you better go and apply for it.' Again, colleagues came to my rescue so to speak. They were very supportive and encouraging of my knowledge. And they said, 'you know, you know what you're talking about, here's what you have to hone in on though.'"

With the exception of one woman, all responded with people who they perceived were being supportive at the time. One woman responded with the answer "I can't think of anyone who stands out who was giving me guidance or advice or counselling. But I can think of someone who I would say gave me support without me directly knowing it or recognizing it at the time. I recognized, I think I recognized that someone did some things for me without me knowing that they were doing them for me and without telling me that they were doing them, that probably had a significant impact on my career. That person was [her supervisor's supervisor, a superior in the company]." She

described how she would have "happily continued" in her position, but "he kind of, I wouldn't say pushed, I wouldn't say forced, but maybe pushed me into becoming a supervisor, which completely changed my whole career track. And I think he did that because he thought that he recognized some potential. But then again without ever saying anything to me, he just kind of did this." When asked if she recognized this support afterwards, she replied, "Yes, looking back at it, I didn't really think about it at the time why these things were happening and why I was the, I hadn't been there very long. There were people who had been there a lot longer than I had. And I didn't know why I was being pushed into these new jobs in new areas. . . . and I didn't realize any of that at the time, but looking back a couple of years later, I thought it must have been some things that he did, some influence that he had." The move to the newly created supervisory position started the woman thinking about her career, and what she "was going to do for the rest of my life." This superior was perceived to be supportive, while the woman's immediate supervisor was not. "I don't mean that as he wasn't supportive, but he wasn't anti-, he wasn't against me, but he wasn't actively supporting me either. He was looking out for himself."

Support Perceived in Retrospect

This brings up a second aspect of support -- support that is not perceived until looked at in retrospect by the woman. The interviewer asked each of the women whether, looking back at her career, she recognized someone as having given her guidance, advice or support, but at the time she did not know of this person's actions, or she did not perceive the actions as being supportive. The resulting answers are shown in Table 12.

Table 12

Support Perceived in Retrospect

Person	Frequency
Immediate supervisor	6
Mother	1
None	7
None, family	1
Other superiors	3
Colleagues	2
Other family member	1

In retrospect, the immediate supervisor was perceived as acting in a supportive manner. ". . . the person who

probably comes to mind first would have been my supervisor at XXXXXXX at first. Things happened at that time that I probably didn't appreciate as much as I should have. You know I thought, you know, it was a nice chance to do something different, . . . I think as I've dealt with him more and more over the years, I've appreciated him more and more. But he'd be the one, I would say, I didn't appreciate as much, or didn't realize what he was doing at the time as much." "I used to think it was just sort of, 'I don't care what's going on, just make sure that no one bothers me about your area,' sort of thing. But I don't think that anymore. I think that it's more, 'I have confidence in you, the way you're doing things. I will support you and make sure everybody knows I will support you, unless you really screw up', well even so, but then you answer to him anyway. But to a certain extent I think perhaps I have misinterpreted, or have in the past." "A lot of times I didn't think he was doing me much of a favour, because I would be working a lot of extra hours to do these special projects for him. So it really didn't seem like much of a favour. But now I realize the fact that I probably wouldn't be where I am now without having done that extra work and learned all those things that I wasn't aware of before. And had that exposure in the

organization. So it didn't always seem like it was a help, but in the end it was."

Other superiors were perceived as supportive, again in retrospect, mainly because they instituted moves to other departments or areas. One woman wanted to relocate, ". . . the people who arranged to get me moved, I think looking back, they did that more as a favour, because there wasn't that much of a job." She identified a superior in the group she was in as having arranged the move for her with another superior. Another woman was seconded to several positions, again by superiors in the corporation. ". . . My second manager that I had, I always thought was a real chauvinist, and he had no people skills, and didn't appreciate me. And then I found out later that he was the one who recommended me for the job in [another division]. And found out there's all these things on my file that he'd been trying to do for me. He realized I wasn't happy where I was and it was time to do something." Another also said a superior ". . . comes across as, in a really offensive manner. But I can't help but think that maybe he does. It really is what he thinks is in your best interest. He's not trying to piss you off, or get you back, he's just trying to help you. And the only reason I'm saying that is that fact that he let me take courses, and he's let me do a few other things that I really didn't expect him to let me

do. But it's a lot easier being negative about him than positive."

One woman worked with a superior who was not in her immediate hierarchy. The superior was viewed as being influential, and more as a role model. "She's moved up, you know, to the top of wherever she is, and yet she really maintains an image of, you know, she can just talk to anybody. And she's very professional, but she's also very nice, you know? And I guess she's done a lot for me that I really hadn't realized it, under the surface. I know she's given a lot of feedback to my supervisors and things like that. . . . She's helped me realize a couple things. One is that I get along well with her and the feedback that she's given, a lot is that, you know, I did good work for her and that, but much of it is that she likes to work with me because she thinks I deal well with people. . . . And that has made me question the work that I do now, because sitting at a terminal seven or eight hours a day isn't making very good use of your interpersonal skills."

Two women reported colleagues as being supportive, one with a positive approach, the other appearing negative. "I think the guy I replaced, I had a very good working relationship with him before, when I was in my other position. . . . I think he was quite instrumental in me getting the position, like I think he spoke very highly of

me. . . . I don't know what he actually did. He left the company." "I suppose this female colleague back at XXXXXX, was one who I didn't think supported me at first. In fact, I thought she quite was condescending, but learned she was one of the background people that was encouraging me."

Of the five women who answered originally that they perceived receiving no support during their career, two maintained this view, although one did mention her upbringing. "I think that if I say I'm successful today and I ask myself why am I successful today, I don't think there is any one person or anything I've read. In fact for me I think the biggest influence for me is probably my childhood. I grew up in an environment where there was a very strong work ethic. And that you, if you worked hard, you would get your rewards. And I think that, to me, has probably been the thing, the philosophy I live by, and I think, I think with that philosophy I can be successful at anything I do. So my childhood was one of, if you work hard you'll get your rewards and I think that's been ingrained in me. And I've done that and they've come. The rewards have come." One of the other three women cited a colleague as being supportive, the other two claimed various family members. One woman's relative helped introduce her to someone influential in a company when she was looking for a job. The other said "I know it sounds

corny, but I guess my mother influenced me. She was always independent and I look for influences. Something must have influenced me to be independent, because I'm quite independent, and I think she did. Because she always said, 'well do the best you can, no matter what you are.' But she emphasized that, in her own way. She didn't think of engineering, that was beyond her scope. She wasn't quite that far advanced. But she used to think of jobs like a lab technician 'would be a good job, you'd make a lot of money doing that.' She was always very proud that she worked for years and years and rose to quite a high position in her job. . . . basically I didn't have any conversations with my father that I can remember. So you know, none of my aunts or grandmother, none of those people ever worked. And my dad wasn't the slightest bit interested in university professions. So I know my mother always wanted me to go to university, she always said that."

Family influence was mentioned by two other women. "One of the big influences for me, the big drives for me was, this isn't actually a person, but probably more environment. Like when I grew up, we were a big family and we didn't have much money. And I think from that, everybody in my family has a real drive to make something out of themselves, I guess." ". . . after having a

scholarship from high school and having a B average coming out of university in the first year, it was just an absolute blow to my ego, right? . . . I felt like I had failed my whole year, and my mom thought that I had done so well. But she just never stopped encouraging me, and I remember saying not only to me, but to other people, about how well I'd done, and how hard I was working, and that I was going to make it. I think I heard this everyday, or she would say 'you'll do it, you'll do fine. Just do your best.' She was always there in those years, in those first couple years. That was when I really think about it, those were critical years of support to make it through university. . . . I think it was the whole chain of events of my childhood years and my university years that sort of made me want to go on."

Summary of Volunteered Responses

Over half of the women interviewed identified supervisors as being a prime source of support in their careers. Of these, the majority remembered their first supervisor in their first job as being particularly supportive. The actions perceived as being supportive centered around the supervisor's belief in the woman's abilities, and was shown by encouraging words and challenging work assignments. The supervisor also provided

technical and political support and knowledge, but little career guidance. It is important to remember that many of the women were providing information based on their experiences in other organizations as well as the one they currently work in.

Colleagues were perceived to be approachable on issues of work relationships and technical problems. The women identifying colleagues as supportive stated that they provided moral support, but the quotes indicated that it is generally not of an intimate nature.

The women perceived family members as being supportive during the period when educational and career decisions were being made, but this form of support was rarely mentioned after the women began working.

Spouses and partners provided moral support, and occasional advice on technical or political issues.

Support and Career -- Elicited Responses

During the next stage of the interview, the women were prompted by the interviewer for their responses through general identification of people who may have provided support. The purpose was to identify ways in which others may have provided crucial support, but which were not recognized by the women. The questions asked depended on the response to the volunteered, unprompted section of the interview, and resulted in each woman being asked about the support of any supervisors, other superiors in the organization, peers within and outside the organization, subordinates, friends and family. For example, if a woman identified a supervisor as being supportive in the unprompted section of the interview, she was asked about the presence of support from other superiors, peers, subordinates, friends and family.

Supervisors and Superiors

Many women identified their supervisors as being supportive in the previous section of this paper. The examples used to illustrate what these people did that was interpreted as support are common in both sections. "In general terms I can see that they've supported me. I think just from getting a little bit of feedback. . . . I think

those people have helped me, just because they teach you to do a better job." ". . . the kind of support I'm thinking of are like votes of confidence. I again, I can't think of words of advice or anything else these people have done. It's just showing confidence in what I'm doing, and my relationship with [her supervisor] is more like a peer relationship. When we talk about things, there are certain areas that I know more about than he does, so we have discussions back and forth and give each other advice. Although obviously he is my boss and I'm aware of that all the time. I don't feel like he's coaching me and I don't think he feels like that either. But obviously he's given me very good opportunities."

Others mentioned supervisors who let them work independently. "The supervisor I have right now is very good, very. He really lets me do what I want to do, but not, he sort of believes in me and my abilities too. And not, doesn't seem to be always looking over my shoulder."

Challenges and opportunities to prove oneself were perceived as support. "I think probably I've had a couple of supervisors that really pushed me, or I felt like I was being pushed. You know they sort of challenged me beyond my comfort level. So it wasn't an easy job anymore. There was a challenge to it. Maybe a little bit beyond, maybe what the nominal position title was. And probably those

people all really helped me, you know. Because that gives you a little more confidence for the next time, or when a new job comes along, you've got that much more confidence that you can do it. So I guess I was fortunate that I had a couple of supervisors that kind of pushed me. Because I don't know if I would have pushed myself. It's easy not to push yourself. Because when you're pushed like that, you're not doing, you don't always do as good of a job." ". . . he was my all time favorite boss ever. I'd still practically pay to work for him. You know when you're young and inexperienced and want someone to tell you what to do? 'Here's my problem, tell me the answer.' He never told you the answer. He'd sit and listen while you worked it out verbally in front of him. And it's very few that can do that. He was very good at developing me."

The women were asked what area the discussions and actions that were perceived as supportive were related to. Some was in the technical skills area. "He was instrumental in making sure I had the right courses and helping me out with my customers. Actually he assigned me to a big brother who explained all the technical details, and between the two of them, they have given me such a strong technical background, you'd be hard pressed to snow me [in that area]. He was good at bringing me along in a technical sense. We didn't discuss career . . ." One

woman learned skills to be used in her technical role. "There have been questions where he said 'that's not very clear and if I was to construe it this way, I would respond this way. And if I was to understand it in these other terms, then I would give you a completely different answer.' And he's sort of given me examples of those kinds of things. Which has helped me to refine my questioning and interviewer skills a bit, I think." She went on to say that she suspects this man may be starting to provide "that sort of a mentor scenario, but I'm not really sure yet whether it's just sort of, I'm not really sure if he's just being quite friendly, or whether something could, I mean, he's been very easy to talk to to get the information that I require technically to get the job done." This man has "given me some advice in terms of, as I said, this project is a bit of a hot potato, and he's said officially management is saying 'we're being really open and you can propose whatever solution you like, but unofficially, they've already defined a scenario, and so tread lightly in that area.'" She mentioned that she is "a little bit unsure as to whether I'm looking for a mentor, and so I'm reading that into what he's doing," considering the fact that none of his colleagues have volunteered any more information other than what she has asked for.

Another woman definitely did not receive technical support from her supervisors. "Well, they've all sort of taken an interest, but I must say, I've never really had a, working in the XXXXXX area, I was sort of working in an area where my superiors didn't really know, well, I shouldn't say they didn't know what I was doing, but it was a relatively new area. And I suppose they relied on me to keep things working smoothly. And it wasn't an area that they understood well. So I have always worked relatively independently, like I have sort of always been the expert without having other experts, I mean, I have other experts to go to, but my supervisors have never been the experts technically that I have ever gone to." Support comes in the area of administrative details and policy interpretation.

Career discussions, outside of formal discussions during performance evaluation sessions, were never mentioned. The women did not recall having informal discussions with any supervisor or superior. "He's never actually asked me what my career goals were, we've never talked in that regard." "I don't think there's a lot of planning that goes around right now." During the formal discussions, one woman mentioned that she wanted to take a course, but did not think she would be allowed to because of budget cutbacks. "He encouraged me to take it anyway,

or apply for it, because he said there was money in the budget. It did get approved and I was very surprised that I got to take the course. And I got to go on a few others. But as far as career paths or anything, I think you could safely say that I'm stagnant and I don't seem to be doing too much. But then that's partly my fault because I don't have a direction of where I want to go right now."

It was difficult for women to think of specific examples or situations in which they thought a supervisor or superior was supportive. Most described it in general terms, and could not give further details. One described an event with her supervisor's supervisor that occurred recently. ". . . recently I did a design document and specification report for a project that I'm working on and she was involved in reviewing it. And I never had any feedback from her for the longest time, and I was really taking that she didn't really like what I did because she never said anything about it. We had a meeting a couple days ago to review this whole thing, what everyone thought about it. And before the meeting, she came in early and said, 'this looked like a lot of work,' and I said 'yes.' She said, 'well, I was really impressed.' It required an official sign-off, and she signed her name to it and gave it back. And I was just shocked, and to me that happens once in a career. She doesn't do these things very often."

Another woman was placed in a new position and recognized her new supervisor as being supportive. "I think he was determined that I was going to succeed. So we just used to have lots of sit down, how's it going, and go through all the stuff, types of sessions. He watched what was going on very carefully. I think to make sure I was going in the right direction and I had my priorities straight, and that I was doing the right things. I can't think of specific things, but I know he did spend an awful lot of time with me. And I think that's kind of contrary to his style usually. So I was very grateful for that time too, because it kept me feeling comfortable. . . . We did some career planning, such as it can be I guess. I was going into a new area and I didn't know what was available for me. He gave me some advice in terms of his own job. And again, it wasn't advice so much, as some ideas of how long I would have to be in that position before I could move, and the areas I could go in. There was discussion about career plans or lack of. Because opportunities get to be less and less and options get less."

Peers

Peers, colleagues and professional associates provide a wide array of support. In some instances, the women see themselves as part of a team working together for the same

goals. ". . . because we all do the same job, we're pretty loose in just pulling together to make sure that all the work gets done. So well, for example, we're all supposed to be working this weekend, and I just can't work. So the others are just going to do whatever I would have, whatever I should be doing tomorrow and presumably I would be doing the same for them some other weekend." "I think everyone supports everyone else. We're not in competition with each other, we just want everyone to do well. Because, personally I believe that when you see somebody else, say at the same level as you get a promotion, to me that makes me feel that things are moving in this department and that good work is recognized. I don't feel like I should have got that promotion. . . . Also the people here have pretty much the same objectives, like we are all trying to do the same job and we're all trying to make the same people happy. So if I'm looking at somebody's work and I find something that they missed, it's totally, it's looked at as a positive thing. So, I think like in computers, it's so easy to make mistakes, and it's so easy to not know everything because there's so much to know." "I was in a specialized area workwise, that there wasn't much you were going to do, or talk to someone else about, because no one else had a clue what it was about. You were in your own little world a little bit. But certainly when we ran into

any problems in any of the other areas, you immediately went to the other supervisor and had lots of support. We'd often end up, it we had major problems with systems or something, with three or four supervisors acting as a team to try and get it fixed."

Some peers were perceived as providing support in specific areas. "I think the women that I've dealt with have been the most understanding of problems and stuff. . . so we'll talk, the girls in this group, about comments, but, it's sort of a networking in a way, throughout the company, contacts and people. I have some male friends in the company I can talk to about stuff, to get feedback about how I'm feeling, and how I'm reacting and as a male tell me how to best, you would want to handle the situation, and get the most of my reaction. You know, if I'm in a meeting or something, and someone's made a comment that I take offense to, and maybe haven't reacted. Maybe after the meeting I'd approach one of the other people that I know and say, 'did you notice that comment? What do you think of it? How should I react?' And I've done that in a few situations just to see, you know, or did I handle that the way I should have, or was there a better way." "My peers are all male. But I find them, I would say, yes I find them supportive. There are a couple that I would go to before I'd go to a couple others. And one in particular

has been quite supportive. I won't say, it's more sort of discussing what we should do about certain general problems. I don't think I've ever, like I've never really discussed specific, well, that's not true. In one case I did discuss specific employee problems. But there's nobody that I find particularly antagonistic. I find that they're all generally supportive. . . . They give their opinions. Might relate some similar experience and say 'this is how I handled it.' Might rely on their experience, if I've had, if I'm not sure for example, how to approach the manager about something. Some of the other supervisors have been here like for about ten years, so they know him a lot better than I do. I might ask how he would be best approached on this subject, and they would give their, 'well I think I'd handle it this way.'" ". . . he was great with technical issues, and saying 'make sure you've looked at that kind of stuff.' That was more technical. I also learned a few things about supervising from him because he was supervising slightly ahead of where I was. And he'd come into my office and we'd compare notes. . . . He gave me ideas, and also acted as a sounding board."

The idea of a sounding board was also expressed by another woman. "I've got a few friends at work that are friends outside of work, and . . . I don't directly work with any of them. . . . I certainly talk on a personal

level with them. But I don't with anyone else. Definitely talk about problems at work. They're, they certainly offer their advice. They listen or offer different stories of their own or whatever. I think it's more just a sounding board than anything. I think in your own mind you know what your options are. It's not like you don't know what your options are. But I guess if you're in a position, I think we all go through the same kinds of things at one time or another and they can relate their experiences." "One of the things about work here, you don't work a lot with your peers, so it's not really, you would socialize with them and maybe talk to them and discuss things, but I wouldn't say you get a lot of support, no. . . . you might sit and talk about things, the way things are going and stuff. But usually I never have any time. And they're too busy, and you're too busy."

Some women do not have close peer relationships at work through direction from superiors. "It's kind of a funny group, because the [supervisor's supervisor] seems to really discourage any kind of interaction and that. . . . Today is a little bit quiet, but some days it can be like this and everybody is there. . . . There is not a lot of interaction. So, no I don't think I do get a lot of support, but then I don't know how much they [male employees] get either. I don't think it's any different."

"It was a really lonely job. Because you really can't discuss, you're really dealing with management issues all the time, so you really can't discuss them with people of the same level."

Others make a conscious decision not to develop close relationships with any or all peers. "I've never been shy about going for help in technical issues, because I have limitations in that area. So I'm the type of person who will ask questions if I don't understand something, you know, rather than be illiterate about it. So basically, whoever is approachable." One woman is very specialized in her field, and cannot go to any peers for technical support. As well, she chooses to deal with personal issues herself. "If I'm really running into a problem in dealing with somebody, I might go to my supervisor, but I usually work it out myself and find out why. Because if I hadn't had the problem in the beginning and it's just cropped up, then obviously there is something it can be related to. And the interaction isn't all that great that it would be a problem. You can still have a working relationship with somebody and not like them personally." Others specifically mentioned trust. "I look to some of my peers partly because of the nature of what I'm doing, particularly for technical support. I don't know about moral support, I don't know if I'd trust some of them."

Another woman whose peers are men says, "I enjoy discussing things with them, I find them very very fair. . . . I think I trust the men more than I do talking to another woman." Another says the opposite, "I'm the only female in the group, and I don't feel comfortable talking with the men about the politics of the situation. I guess one of them I don't really trust. I feel like everything I say to him will in turn be relayed back to the project leader. So I don't feel like there's sort of that confidentiality there. The other two I don't really know well enough to feel that I could approach them."

Peers outside of work provide professional and personal support. "It's always gaining or giving information. Where I talk over my problems or concerns, or get feedback, or even find out as far as education in the area, it's all external. That's where my peers are." "I got professional and personal support, and education, because, once again I did that, to get very in tune with my profession, in tune with my colleagues in the profession, and to learn from them what their companies are doing. And to also just observe how they network, how they react with each other, how they interact with each other, and just as plain learning. And then along the way found friends too, so that socially we enjoyed each others' company." "I do have a couple other close friends who, well a couple are in the

computer industry, in the same field as I am. Well, maybe not in quite the same. . . . I wouldn't say I go to them for help, but I discuss a lot of things with them. They tell me what's going on with them, and I tell them what's going on with me. Well, it's just interest, just something that you have in common. That you can relate to. It's not necessarily we're having all these problems, we're talking about things we're doing. Like working on a good project, or you're working on something challenging. It's just something you can talk to them about, whereas you can't talk about the same thing in any great depth to your mother or something. They don't know what you're talking about."

Subordinates

Six women were first line supervisors, having anywhere from one and eight people reporting to them. Five were second line supervisors and had between ten and forty five people in their group, with between four and six reporting directly to them.

Subordinates were rarely identified as being supportive or helpful, outside of normal expectations. One woman said that all subordinates reporting to her were supportive, but "I don't know if it's outside the normal job expectations though. I rely on them as experts in their own areas. They're the detailed experts, and I'm

sort of the generalist. And if I need specific information, I would ask them, and expect them to be able to give me it, if not immediately, then tomorrow, if they had to run a report or something like that. But I don't see that as being outside their normal, that is part of what I expect them to do."

One woman declined to mention any supportive subordinates, equating this with favoritism. "I try to treat all my, the people who work for me, fairly and equitably. So I try not to show any favoritism. I am fortunate in that I have a very talented group of people working for me. And I rely on all of them for support."

Another woman also said that everyone who has ever worked for her was easy to work with. "I've never had any real problems with anybody that's worked for me. And I guess they're supportive in the fact that they've accepted me in the role that I'm in. And I've never had people say, 'well, I'm not going to do that just because she doesn't know what she's doing.' 'She's just a woman', or whatever."

Technical support by subordinates was mentioned by one woman. She was placed in a supervisory position in an area where she had little knowledge. ". . . there were one or two people who had been in that department for many years that were really well qualified. And I relied on their

judgment a lot Especially for the first couple of months that I was there." Another relied on her subordinate for more personal support. "She was supportive in that she always covered for me, which I felt was supportive. She would very professionally say that I was in a meeting. She was always there to take my calls when I wasn't. She was always there to interrupt me when I was working with someone through lunch, because he didn't take a break for lunch because he didn't need lunch. And she knew I would be dying there famished. . . . She'd always come in and say, 'can I get you a sandwich?' She'd always stay after. I mean, she was just an exception to the rule."

One woman described her hiring philosophy in which she built teams with complementing skill sets and personalities. "We just understood each other, and we were just sensitive to each others' needs."

Friends

Although they were never mentioned by the women in response to the initial unprompted question, friends are perceived as providing a wide range of support, as evidenced by the responses in this section. Personal and moral support was often cited by the women. "I have a couple [of friends within the corporation] who are working mothers also, and so we often discuss, and in fact we have

children of similar ages. So it's 'have you gone through this stage', or 'how did you cope with this?'" "It's the social interaction more than anything. And that can influence you at work. It's probably one of the, I think, really big things is having confidence in yourself and self-esteem. And obviously having that social interaction where possibly just getting along with people can build up your self-esteem." "Most of my friends outside of the friends I have at work are friends from university days, or from child rearing that I've gotten to know. So they're mostly connections from other areas, or parents of my children's playmates. So our relationship is formed on social or children things." "Personal support and recreational. Because you want to leave the office behind and just forget about the other five days a week, and just do things you enjoy outside. I'm very busy, very active. . . . So really you can mentally forget what you're doing during the day if you can, once you get outside of the environment, and the same with all my friends too. And not too many people are at my level, especially other women. They're not in high level as far as being supervisors. I don't know anyone at my level. So people that you try to explain your problems to, have a hard time relating to them."

This comment is echoed by many women who deal with their work issues by themselves, with little discussion with other individuals. They consider themselves to be independent, and do not want to be seen as weak. "I guess I've always been independent. It's, I guess what my parents have told me. I have to solve my own problems, plus I'm quite strong willed. Because if I don't really agree with it, I wouldn't work really hard at it anyway. So I really have to believe in it one hundred percent, or I won't do it. So it has to come from me anyway. And I've never found it absolutely so impossible that I couldn't really get myself out of my dilemma, or my thinking process is so negative, that I'm at a standstill. I always try to find the, a way out, and I usually do, so far." "I usually do things with my own gut feel. And often that's all it is, just a gut feel of what to do. But I've supervised for a lot of years, so it sort of, you do learn from your own experiences. And you have to feel out a lot of situations for what they are, because depending on the people involved and the personalities involved, every situation can be completely different. . . . outside of the office, I find that most people are pretty bored. Because they don't know the people involved, they don't know the work involved. So I don't. And I find inside you're asking for trouble. Because when you're talking to someone over here, about

something someone else did before, and you know it's people are saying 'I didn't say that and how did you even hear it?' I don't like to do that, I pretty much keep things to myself. Besides the basic work items, you know, people go for lunch with someone and they tell you something, I tend to not get involved, or tell anyone, or think anything of it." "I've always tried to keep my work life and my other life, my non-work life, separate. So I really don't, when I'm away from work, especially over the last few years, I try and put it behind me. So people outside of work haven't really influenced me. I don't use their experience to improve myself." "I might mention [a personal problem at work], but not in as much detail. Plus too, you know, you don't want to be seen as weak. As a female in the workplace, you don't want to be accused of being weak. So you don't want to let anyone know when you're having problems. You're afraid they're going to think you're, you know, it's that time of the month or something. You know, you just don't want to be seen, so sometimes you have to keep a lot inside. It probably isn't healthy. You just can't discuss things as intimately because you don't want to be perceived as having a weakness, and them using it against you."

For other women, there is the perception that their friends could not help them with any work related

situation. "I think for the most part, my friends are pretty unaware of what I do at work, or the responsibilities I have at work. I don't tend to talk about work a lot, outside of work. So you know, if I get a promotion or something, I'll say something and people are happy for me. But, or if I've applied for a job or I'm interested in something else, I'll mention it. But I don't go looking to them for support. Because I think I've got a real good job and I don't want to sound like I'm bragging. And people don't understand what the company does, so you can't talk intelligently to anybody outside the company about what you do anyway, and get any kind, well, my friends tend to be generically supportive. That's why they're your friends, right? So they're going to give you all these motherhood statements and not understand the concern anyway, so what's the point of going to them for some meaningful advice. I don't. Not in terms of work. it has to be something that they understand before their advice is any good, I think."

Those who feel their friends have the knowledge to assist them sometimes turn to their friends for technical or career advice. "If we meet for lunch and there are some of them who are in supervisory. And we have talked it over very generally, 'what would you do in a situation of . . .?' But it always seems like your situation is unique."

"It's relying on their experiences, again some of them have been with the company for a long period of time. . . . I rely on their past experience, their work knowledge, current and past, and whether I think they sort of have the same general kind of approach or outlook to what's going on as I do. . . . Friends are primarily people that I had worked with, my friends, as opposed to our friends, like my husband's and mine. Mine tend to primarily be people I have worked with before, or had some, gone to university with, or had some dealing with before. And yes, they may not know what I do on a daily basis right now, but they certainly understand to work in this environment. They are, for the most part, technical people themselves."

"They would, maybe they've got problems in their own organizations as I do, so they've got examples, or they've got examples of how they've handled something, or they just give you support. . . . the ones outside the company would be the ones to maybe parallel your case to something they've had and offer their advice that way."

Two women identified friends that helped them network and meet other people. ". . . she knew a lot of different people to talk to. A lot of women in high positions, which again, was interesting and exciting. So she was a mentor in that she was always there. If something really disappointing would happen, I would phone her, and she

would somehow be able to kick you into gear with a plan of action and totally get you out of being down." ". . . she had a very good network of people that she knew. And even though the jobs I was finally offered were not connections through her, I did still get to know a lot of people because of her." ". . . because some of them are women who are in business at about the same level I am, either a rung below or a notch above, so we share just what's going on in the business world and just how we go about, what are our common, common issues. In fact, if we're supervising, what are our common issues. And I can tell just from their questions of me, that they're eager to hear my views on these things, and vice versa. So we're feeding each other."

Several women mentioned that they check their perceptions or reactions with others as a verification tool. "If I was having any problems at work, I would probably go to my supervisor. I might talk to my husband or a friend in general terms, you know, just to see if it was really a problem or not, or if it was all, if they thought it was a problem. But I think I just know if it was a problem or not, I'd just approach my supervisor if it was a real problem. Sometimes my peers though, like if it was something at work that was going on, I'd probably consult with other people at the same level as me. . . .

Before I'd approach my supervisor. I might do that. Because it might be a problem we're all having. Maybe it is a problem that I perceive that doesn't exist." ". . . the biggest help that friends, especially friends that I think are in business do, is just listen to you and try and see if maybe you are over exaggerating the importance of what's going on, or if you're just over worried about things that just don't matter." ". . . if it's really bugging me, I'll go to a friend and say, 'you know this is bothering me' and they try and put it in perspective for me."

When asked about friendships inside or outside the corporation, one woman responded "They're mostly outside. When I first joined the company, I made a concrete and overt statement that I was not going to socialize with the people that I worked with. In some ways that may have been a mistake. And in some ways, in the last couple of years, it's changing." She went on to describe how she recently developed a friendship with a person at work, and goes to him about any work issues. Her other friends do not understand what she does at work, and she doesn't approach them with problems. "If I have plans to see some friends, then it would come up in conversation, what a bad day I had, and why I think it's a bad day. And I would get some feedback from them. If I'm not planning to see those

people, then I tend just to let it drop. I don't phone them up and say, 'can we talk about this?'"

Family

Family life when growing up was mentioned by a few women as being influential in their lives. ". . . my parents never ever told me I couldn't do anything because I was a girl. They never told me that I couldn't do this or that. I suppose it was nonsexist child rearing, they just didn't realize that, that back then they were teaching that." "I think a lot of the drive and everything comes just from things that you learned when you were young."

Husbands and Partners

Husbands or close male companions were perceived as being supportive by many women. Often it is just as a listener. "He was always there if I had a rough day. He would always be there to comfort me. He never liked to talk too much about the nitty grittier details, but he certainly always gave me some support. It was very good. Other than that, well you know, he was always willing to say, 'if you don't like it, leave.'" "If something is bothering me at work, I'll go home and tell my husband and he certainly cheers me up, or tells me, well basically he gives me a pep talk on it." "He is a very supportive

individual, who has provided me with a great deal of assistance in developing skills and improving myself. . . . it's more in the area of being supporting. Just a sounding board for ideas and providing constructive input on ideas. For myself, I'm sort of your typical type A personality and he's trying to turn me into a type B. And I think that's good. That's positive."

Most often, husbands were perceived as supportive if they helped at home with child care and household duties, and also allowed the woman freedom in making her own choice as to work or not. Most women with young children had live-in help, but husbands still carried out these functions. "He really helps out a lot, and from what I can tell anyway, seems to be proud of me in the fact that I'm an engineer and have a good job. . . . He doesn't have any problems cooking and cleaning and looking after the kids. That kind of thing. And if I have to work late, it's no big deal. He'll come and pick me up from work. Makes things fairly easy for me." "My husband is great. He'd have to be to put up with me. He lives, works on the mode that he's not going to tell me what to do. I have to figure it out. If you ever have children, you're always torn between 'should I be a stay at home mom or should I be a career woman?' And particularly in my field it is not easy. . . . Sometimes I get home from work and I'm mad and

I say, 'well, I'm going to be a housewife. Can you support me?' And he takes all this in stride and says 'you make your own decisions.' So he's good. Whatever I decide to do, he'll support me, so he's super." As a specific example of supportive behaviour, she said she and her husband alternate taking vacation days off from work to look after the children when child care is not available.

"He doesn't give me a lot of guidance, but he gives me whatever support I need. Like if he doesn't push me to pursue a career or anything, but if that's what I want, then he's fine. He's very supportive at home with the kids and everything. And so if I'm not coming home, it's no big deal. He's just, he's just there. . . . But he only offers, he offers advice when I ask him for it." "When we decided to have a child, it was a big decision, because of course you are going to be off work for a few months plus you have a big new responsibility. And I, we, were before when we were planning children, we were, or I was very adamant that, and he supported that, I was going to go back to work. I wasn't going to stay home. So he encouraged that. . . . he's not in this field at all, he's not in business. So he was very much, 'you have to do what you think you want, or what you think is right.' He didn't try and make my decision for me because he just doesn't have a clue about what I was doing. But as far as the idea that I

would be travelling and that, he didn't have any problem with it. . . . He has no problem with the idea that he has to be home looking after our son if I'm out of town sort of thing. So he's really good that way, really good that way. It just gives me that much less guilt about working, because there's no doubt about it. . . . there is a lot of guilt that goes with that one. Really a lot. And if it's not from peers and, pressures just internally that you have to really wrestle with that idea that you're not there and you're not maybe doing some things that people think you should be doing." ". . . he just really gives me pep talks. And another thing my husband does is that he gives me control over what I want to do. So a lot of times, it bothers me, like I considered leaving my job or quitting work to stay home with my little girl. And some days are worse than others. . . and he says 'you know, if you really want to quit work, if it really bothers you that much than go ahead and do it.' And then I think, well, there's all these other reasons why I shouldn't be quitting. And he makes me think about those things. But I know if I actually went into work one day and bang gave in my resignation, I know that he wouldn't be upset. He would say, 'if that's really what you want to do, that's fine.' He's supportive in that way in that what I want to do he'll

stand by me, no matter what it is. Even if he disagrees with it, which sometimes I think he does."

"There's always some discussion as I take on a new challenge and feel the pressures of it. He's aware of this and he's very supportive of it. He does lots of things to accommodate those kinds of pressures that he knows I feel at work. So he's very supportive and consciously does things to not railroad my career. . . . When I work late, he doesn't complain about having to make supper for himself. Or you know, things like that. He doesn't begrudge time at work that I have to work. Or suffering from stress headaches or things like that. Like, he's just understanding. He never throws my job back at me. Like I never feel like I'm a poor wife because I work."

The unconditional acceptance of the woman's choices by family is very important to some of them. "A lot of it is just in acceptance in the way that I do things or the way that I choose to live my life. The fact that I choose to work at the kind of work I work at. The kind of hours that I choose to put in. The fact that I choose not to have a family, or that I am fairly dedicated to what I do and may choose to work weekends, may choose to cancel vacation, may choose to do a number of things. . . . they're willing to listen to me complain, run off at the mouth, bitch, and provide, if asked, comments on situations. I think equally

as important, they're willing to not provide unsolicited comments. So and that's important to me. They won't tell me what I, what they think I should do and they won't tell me what they would do unless I specifically ask."

A few women recognized some potential areas of conflict in their relationship with their husbands. "I'm in one of those tricky kinds of situations where I have a much better job than he does. And he's not satisfied with his own job, but he does not take it out on me. I think he could make it difficult for me if he wanted. But he doesn't. I think that's supportive. Makes it easier for me to sort of do whatever I want to do at work. But of course I have to keep talking to him about it, because he doesn't like to feel left out either. You have to work with that." "I just want to forget about it when I get home. Sometimes I do, I guess too, because it almost seems to me, he's an engineer too and I don't want to let him know that I'm having problems handling anything, almost. Do you know what I mean? I've got it under control, don't worry about it. . . . I think that's part of it, but also I just don't want to talk about it. And he's not a political type of person, he likes to do his job and come home and you know, he doesn't want to know the politics. I don't think he's got a lot of good advice on the matter." ". . . he's experienced a few setbacks in his career and stuff, and I

think it makes it hard for him. I know one time he was really depressed about work and stuff, and I come home and I'm all excited and stuff because I had just gotten a promotion to supervisor. And he was just, 'oh, that's nice', and walked away. I was so upset, I took it the wrong way, that he was being threatened. It was just that, you know, it's hard to be excited about someone's career when his wasn't, I think he'd be happier if he was clearly in a more senior position. We're about equal in the levels in our jobs and I think at times it would make him more comfortable if he was clearly the breadwinner. It's, you know, he's definitely not negative. I wouldn't have married him . . . a lot of relationships I was in earlier ended up ending because I found that the other guy couldn't figure out how to handle the fact that I wanted a career. And that I wasn't going to be Suzy Homemaker and look after him and stuff like that. That I needed nurturing as much as he did, and it took a long time to find somebody like that."

Summary of Elicited Responses

Supervisors and superiors were perceived as being supportive if they provided challenges and opportunities for the woman to prove her abilities, often accompanied by feelings of being pushed. The vote of confidence of a

supervisor helped the women develop technical and political skills. Little career planning was carried out, outside of the formal performance review process. One superior provided information that helped a woman deal with the political aspect of a project.

Peer relationships provided the women with various types of support. Some felt the bond with their peers was based on the work activity itself, and the common goal was to make sure all the work gets done. Peers provide feedback on how to handle problems and situations at work. Several women stated that they did not have any close peer relationships at work because of direction from superiors, or by personal choice. The main function fulfilled by peer relationships is that of information exchange.

Subordinates were not perceived as being supportive beyond normal work expectations. As well, one woman equated supportive behaviour with favoritism, and as such, states she tries to treat everyone equally. The main role of subordinates is to provide information to the supervisor for decision making.

The women perceived friendships as being more intimate and personal than peer relationships. Most said they do not discuss their work situation with their friends outside of the corporations. This is attributed to several reasons. Several women stated they are independent, and do

not feel a need to go to friends for support. Others do not want to be seen as weak. Several felt their friends do not understand what they do and could not possibly help with any work related issues. Even women with friends in the same type of business feel the benefit of their friend's input is limited, as each work situation is unique.

The perception of support from family members is substantially less than that reported during childhood and school years.

Husbands or partners were perceived as being supportive, but rarely for specific work issues. The women felt this support was expressed through actions, such as listening and by helping with household duties and child care. The perception that the spouse was supportive of the woman's career, and allowed her the freedom to choose what she wanted to do, was mentioned by many of the women.

CHAPTER V SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study looked at non-elite women working as tokens or minorities in a male dominated corporation. The main focus of the study was to determine how such women interpret support. The research was designed to collect the information in a manner which preserved the language and descriptions used by the women participating in the study, in order to attempt to alleviate some of the problems identified by Speizer (1981). There are many ideas about supportive relationships, but not many consistent and rigorous studies. The use of imprecise terms such as 'mentor' or 'role model' allows the participant to develop her or his own definition of the word. It is much more important to allow the participant to describe the intensity and form of the relationship, and then fit the descriptive word to that definition. This study was a systematic look at women's perceptions of support, without the imposition of categories and definitions.

Discussion of Interview Findings

The women interviewed do recognize that they have received, or are receiving, support in their careers. The reported isolation of women choosing nontraditional careers did not hold true for the women interviewed in this study. Most of the women identified supportive persons immediately, without being prompted with questions about specific individuals. The women identified situations where they knew of the support at the time, and also other situations where the support of another individual was not recognized until a later time. When asked about specific individuals, the women provided many examples of specific types of actions that they interpreted as support.

No examples of a true mentoring relationship were found in the study. Several women did use the term mentor in their description of supportive relationships, but the term was not used in the manner defined in the literature. When the term was used, the interviewer asked the woman to provide a definition. "A part of me has this image of someone that doesn't really appear to care. I guess is fairly harsh and almost to the point of saying 'you stupid idiot, you can't do it like that, it has to be done this way. You'll never make it if you continue on the path that you're going.' . . . it's almost like a one way

relationship. [the protege] has a lot of respect for the mentor and what the mentor has accomplished . . . so I think there's a lot of respect going one way, but it doesn't appear to be returned the other way, although there must be respect, the mentor must respect the other person in order to even bother." She went on to describe the relationship as dealing with more political skills rather than technical ones, and that the two participants would never achieve an egalitarian relationship. Other women described a mentor as "a person you look up to and respect. And would like to be. . . . like someone who is in your field of work, professionally, that you look towards and say I would like to be like that. . . . I would define role model pretty much the same way." ". . . openly and consciously treats you with respect in front of his supervisors. Gives you responsibilities and tasks that I would say a lot of supervisors wouldn't give." ". . . someone who would help you in your career. Whether it's in recommending you apply for a certain position that's posted . . . or someone who gives you new challenges so you can maybe go on to bigger and better things. . . . a person who takes a special interest in you above and beyond the normal working environment."

These personal definitions of the term mentor give an indication of the potential lack of validity of studies

which use the word, either in a questionnaire or interview situation, without defining it clearly. Some of the women in this study said they had a mentor, but the descriptions of the relationships did not correspond to the academic definition.

The majority of women interviewed in this study perceived themselves as receiving support from an immediate supervisor. Many women identified the supervisor they had in their first job as being supportive. The supervisors were seen as supportive if they showed confidence in the woman and her abilities, if they gave her challenging assignments, and if they allowed her to work independently. Supervisors were perceived as providing more support in technical or political areas, and little in the area of career planning. The relationships seem to correspond to Shapiro et al.'s (1978) definitions of sponsors and guides.

The women interviewed provided many examples of perceived peer support. Most of these relationships fell into the information peer category, as defined by Kram & Isabella (1985). Basically, peers work together as a team to accomplish the goal of getting the work done. Peers provide input on technical issues, but more evidence of support on political issues was found. The women would often approach more experienced peers to discuss the best

way to deal with a supervisor or difficult subordinates. Some examples of collegial peer relationships were given during the interviews. These relationships involve a higher level of trust and some self-disclosure. Although some women said they would never trust their peers with any confidences, others looked to peers for verification of reactions, and reassurances about behaviour. Some women also discuss personal issues, such as child care, with peers at work. These relationships still appear to be closer to the collegial type on the continuum of peer relationships (Figure 2), than the level of special peer, as there appears to be little social interaction between the peers outside of the work setting.

The women described friendships as important, and as serving a different purpose than peer relationships. The examples of friendship emphasized relationships outside the work setting, with bonds that ranged from activity based to relationship based. Most women perceived their friends as very supportive in a general, personal sense. Few went to their friends to discuss specific work related issues. Reasons reported for this varied from preferred independent decision making, fear of being seen as weak, a sense that friends would not understand the issues, and the feeling that discussions about work would bore friends or be seen as bragging. Several women stated that their friends were

not in the same business, and that they would not talk to them about work issues, because that form of friendship helped the woman to form a separation between her work and non-work lives.

Family members provided critical support in the developmental years of the women interviewed. Experiences in childhood were thought to be important in adulthood, and some thought that the way they were raised influenced their choice of a nontraditional career. Parents were perceived as providing various types of support during the selection of a field of study leading to a career. Few women perceived an unconditional support from their parents, where any choice of higher education or career would have been acceptable. Most identified a proactive support, in which direction was provided for higher education, and may have also been for a specific area of study. Implicit support was reported by one woman, who said her parents did not encourage her to pursue a university education, but were disappointed when she did not do so. Some women perceived their parents as being negative and nonsupportive of higher education. The information gathered supports that found in the literature that parents are influential in the development of a child's attitude toward education and career.

Husbands are seen as being an important contributor to a woman's sense of well-being. The women coming from dual career couples said that it was important for the husband to accept the choices made by her, whether the choice was to stay home or work outside the home. Specific examples of husbands' support included being a listener and helping with child care duties. There was evidence of role conflicts and insecurities about one's career. Some women perceived that their husbands were not fully accepting of their careers, almost to the point of being threatened. These difficulties, along with guilt feelings about child care, add to the stress felt by women and their families (Nelson & Quick, 1985).

In summary, the women interviewed in the study recognize and use various forms of support, from various individuals. No form of mentoring relationship was found. Supervisors, particularly first supervisors, are important in developing a woman's self-confidence. Peers are an informal source of information, and are relied on to provide technical and political information. Friends provide general moral and personal support. Family members, particularly parents, provide support and influence a woman's attitude toward education and career choices. Support from husbands and partners helps to alleviate stress related to career and child care issues,

but stress can be compounded when a husband is seen as insecure or threatened by his wife's career.

Recommendations

The most important finding in this study is that women in the corporation are not always as isolated as one might have expected. Although a few identified negative experiences with peers or supervisors, the vast majority recognized support systems within and outside the corporation. Supportive relationships at work are important not only for career development, but also for psychological and physical health (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

The information from the women interviewed in this study emphasizes the importance of a sense of support from one's immediate supervisor. The first supervisor a woman had was singled out by many of the women as being supportive or influential. The reasons are evident. Many young people, women or men, are excited and energetic when starting their first job, but lack some experience and self-confidence. An empathic supervisor can help by showing confidence in the young person's abilities, giving her or him challenging tasks and assignments, and encouraging him or her to develop technical and political skills. Special consideration must be given to women and minorities who enter a predominantly male occupation or organization. These individuals are not socialized in the same manner as men, and may not fully understand the

culture of the organization or the informal networks within the organization. For a large number of women, the first supervisor may be crucial.

The organization looked at in this study, and all organizations in general, must look at developing the human resource element to the fullest. This responsibility lies with the supervisors within the organization. The supervisors of the organization must be trained and encouraged to develop employees. Supervisory training must be stressed, and not cut when budgets are reviewed. The reward systems of the organization must be congruent with this commitment, and developed to strongly encourage staff development. A significant portion of the supervisor's performance evaluation should be based on her or his dedication to the technical, political, and career development of staff members.

No evidence of mentorship was found in this study. The corporation studied would not need to look at the development of formal mentor systems, or the encouragement of mentoring relationships. The key to the successful socialization of women into the organization is through the first supervisor, or other immediate supervisors a woman may have during her career.

Many of the supportive supervisors perceived by the women interviewed were from organizations other than the

one studied. Therefore, the corporation looked at in this study cannot take all the credit for the encouragement these women received.

The corporation must address this issue. The one woman who felt limited support during her career had a first supervisor who was negative in his dealings with all individuals working for him. Negative actions such as these may be detrimental to the development of women's careers.

In summary, a commitment from the top of the organization is required to focus on development of the skills of the first line supervisors, through extensive formal training, and consistent and congruent performance evaluation and reward systems.

Further Research

There are many shortcomings with much of the research done to date in the area of support relationships. Most have a narrow focus, and many use words and terms without providing adequate definitions. Research work should focus on a systematic approach to the issue of support. Fragmenting the problem into small areas, such as mentoring, and imposing categories onto people's experience may result in misunderstandings and misinterpreting the nature of the actual situation that exists.

True mentoring relationships appear to be rare, at least in terms of the sample and corporation studied. It is unknown if mentors are of significant importance in a woman's career, but this study shows that supervisors, particularly first supervisors, play an important role in the development of a confident attitude in women. Further studies should be carried out to determine the nature of the effects of positive and negative supervisory experiences on women.

Another issue arising from this study is the different approaches women have toward friends. Many choose not to discuss work related issues with friends for various reasons. Research should be carried out into the reasons

why women decide not to seek the support of friends for the solution of work related issues, and the implications of this decision.

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APPENDIX 1

STRICTLY PRIVATE
AND CONFIDENTIAL

DATE: 88.06.28

TO:

FROM: (Manager, Human Resources Department)

RE: THESIS ASSISTANCE

I have been approached by Bonnie Stowkowy, a XXXXXXXXXX employee, to assist her in her Thesis for her Master of Business Administration Degree.

Attached for your perusal and consideration as a participant, is some information about the Thesis. Should you decide to participate, please complete and return the attached form to Bonnie, by July 22, 1988. Following receipt and review of the form, Bonnie will select a cross sample from all respondents, to do a personal interview at a mutually convenient time and place. Your participation is purely voluntary.

To ensure the confidentiality of the individuals who participate, the information will be disguised. Further, Bonnie has not been advised of the names of the employees who will receive this letter, and I will not be advised of those who did or did not choose to participate.

If you should have any questions or comments regarding this, please do not hesitate to contact me at XXXXXXXX.

(Manager, Human Resources)

Attach.

I am a graduate student working for the summer at XXXXXXXXXXX in Edmonton. I am conducting a study for my thesis in order to complete the degree of Master of Business Administration (MBA). The study looks at the subject of sources of interpersonal support and the influence on career development of women in traditionally male dominated professions. The study is being carried out under the supervision of Dr. Dallas Cullen at the University of Alberta.

I am interested in this area as I graduated in engineering, a male dominated profession, in 1980. I worked at XXXXXXXXXXX before leaving to pursue the MBA degree in September, 1987. I chose to look at XXXXXXXXXXX as I am familiar with its business, and also because the organization has a primarily male orientation. I propose to study women employed in various areas, including, but not restricted to, engineering, computer systems, operations, research, administration, and finance and accounting. Both supervisory and overtime ineligible non-supervisory staff are being considered.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and confidentiality is assured. I do not know who is receiving this initial contact letter, as it is being sent out by XXXXXX, Manager of Human Resources. The letter is being sent to women in areas we identified as being acceptable for study. All responses will be sent directly to me, and only I will know the names of the respondents. I will remove the names prior to showing the returned forms to my thesis supervisor. She and I will be the only people to see the job title and level of the respondents, and will use this information to select a number of women to interview. Selection will be carried out to obtain a variety of work experience and responsibility.

Your agreement to participate in this study will require that you participate in a recorded interview of approximately two to three hours in length. This will be held at a mutually convenient time in either Edmonton or Calgary. Interviews will be scheduled in September or October. It may be necessary for a short second interview to be scheduled at a later date should more information be required.

Confidentiality is an important aspect of this study. The research method was reviewed by an ethics committee at the University of Alberta. The information gathered will be reported in such a manner that it will be impossible to determine the identity of the respondent. The identity of the organization and the respondents will be disguised. Two bound copies of the completed thesis will be kept at the University of Alberta Libraries. A microfilmed copy will be kept at the National Library of Canada.

I appreciate the cooperation of XXXXXXXXXXX in the development of this proposal, and by allowing me to approach their employees.

Please indicate your interest in participation in the study by returning the attached form to me by July 22, 1988. For your convenience, the form can be returned to XXXXXXXXXXXXX in the interoffice mail, located at XXXXXXXXXXX.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at work at XXX-XXXX, or at my home at XXX-XXXX. Dr. Cullen can be reached at the University of Alberta, Faculty of Business at XXX-XXXX. Thank you for considering this request, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Bonnie Stowkowy

Please return this form under confidential cover to Bonnie Stowkowy, care of XXXXXXXXXXX, by July 22, 1988.

Only Bonnie will see Section I of this form. Both Section I and II will be assigned a number and separated. The thesis supervisor will be shown only Section II of the form which will be used for selecting women to interview. No other persons will see this information.

SECTION I

I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY DESCRIBED IN THE ATTACHED LETTER.

NAME _____ SIGNATURE _____

Address and phone number where you can be reached:

SECTION II

To assist in selection of women to interview, please indicate your job title and level. For example, Engineer Level 4, or Supervisor of Accounting Level 2.